

"Child of God, Child of Ours"
Jeremiah 1:4-10
Rev. Désirée H. Gold
Cottage Grove United Church of Christ
Cottage Grove, Minnesota
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Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

What is Thomas John Newton, the little boy we baptized today, going to be when he grows up? Thomas, why don't you walk up here and tell us what you're going to be when you grow up.

...Hmmm... Thomas doesn't seem to be walking up here very quickly or telling us where he is going to be and what he is going to be doing in twenty years. Oh, well.

Of course, I am kidding. Thomas does not have the ability to walk yet, and, as the Prophet Jeremiah himself told God, "He does not know how to speak yet, for he is only a boy." Neither he, nor his parents or grandparents, nor any of us here today, know how Thomas' life will unfold, how the coming years will play out for him. We may *daydream* about what we want for him, but we cannot know where the twists and turns of life will take him. Even *God* does not know exactly what Thomas will be doing later in life. God has given us each free will, and Thomas will have to make big decisions on his own as he matures.

That said, God has known Thomas since *before his parents even knew they were pregnant with him*. Thomas is a child of God through and through, and nothing we do can change that. Through baptism, we are formally *recognizing* that Thomas is God's child and a part of the Church family, but in the words of Paul's epistle to the Romans, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So, there we have it. Thomas John Newton is a beloved child of God, but no one -- not even God -- knows for certain where life will take him.

How, then, will he discover God's purpose for his life, and how will he answer God's call? Whenever God is ready for him, God will reach out to Thomas. Thomas may, in fact, experience a "lightning bolt" sort of call, when he suddenly *knows without doubt* that God is calling him to one thing or another. Or he may more gradually come to the conclusion that he is meant for one vocation or another -- God's subtle way of calling him. We

can hope that Thomas will have an active prayer life as he grows older and that, through prayer he will be able to discern what it is that God wants him to do with his life.

God can call us to any number of things. Jeremiah was called to prophesy, and maybe little Thomas will be called to be a prophet too. But he may just as well be called to be a doctor or teacher or scientist or any number of vocations. He may find himself working in a job that seemingly has nothing to do with serving God -- but God may call him to some kind of volunteer work outside of his profession, and it is *this* that will become his life's work. There are nearly 7 billion people in the world today, and God knows each one of us and calls us to different tasks.

Since it is *God* who will call Thomas, is there any role for the *rest* of us in his life? Do we really need to be that careful about nurturing him, if it is God who will have the first idea what Thomas should be doing? *Of course* we need to nurture Thomas! That is the very purpose of baptism. At baptism, we -- Thomas' home family and new church family -- vow that we will help him to "live and grow in Christ." By raising Thomas well and teaching him about God, we will make it more possible for him to hear God's call for his life, whenever that call comes. Baptism is as much about *us* -- Thomas' family -- as it is about Thomas himself.

And how will *we* know when Thomas has been called by God? We won't, unless Thomas says, "God is calling me to do thus-and-such." God calls us to various tasks throughout our lives, and it is quite possible that, at the age of five, God will call Thomas to stick up for a classmate on the playground. At this age, Thomas may not recognize it as God's call, but he will simply know that it is something he has to do. The nurture of his home and church families will reinforce this.

Because God knows us before anyone else, God may have plans for us at any age. In other words, we must never discount the worth and importance of the children and youth among us. When I was three years old and my mother was going through a sad time, I comforted her as only a three year old can. There is no doubt in my mind now that God was present in my ability to comfort her. Of course, I could not articulate that at the time.

And what of the many faithful Christians who, try as they might, never hear God calling them? Just because they are not hit by a lightning bolt or do not hear the thundering voice of God does not mean that they have not been called. God calls some of us quietly, and we may never hear it. We may, however, have answered God's call without knowing it.

As we celebrate the baptism of this little baby this morning, let us use the celebration as an opportunity to remember that we, too, have been known by God our whole lives. Let us remember that we, too, are being called to serve God in big or small ways. And let us pray for discernment of that call.

Now let us pray.