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Alexandria, VA 22310  
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Jeremiah 1:4–10  
1 Corinthians 13:1–13

## LOVED INTO CALL

Each Sunday after a worship leader reads from the Bible one, or two, or maybe even three passages, we exactly what we just did. Maybe without quite a theatrical pause, but still we say those words, “The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God,” every week, don’t we?

The phrase “The word of the Lord” occurs over 255 times in scripture—over 200 times in the Old Testament alone. And much of what we mean when we say those words as a response to Scripture is an affirmation of—a reclaiming of—what we believe, and that belief is that God is revealing God’s self in this moment, in this book, in our experiences together. God unveils and shows us who God is.

I doubt we consciously think about what we are affirming—that we’re saying that we have a direct connection to God. See ... when people say that, we often question them or their stability, and yet every Sunday we say it as if we mean it: God interacting with us afresh. The spirit that inspired the book inspires what we are doing. God speaks. We hear, individually and as a group. We say boldly that we are experiencing the divine.

Now some of you in Church School and in Bible studies have studied the Greek word logos, which means the word of the Lord. The Hebrew equivalent of that word is *dabar*. I just think if we are going to say these words in worship and study them and allow them to redefine our behaviors and our priorities, we ought to understand what it is we’re saying; what we’re proclaiming. We are saying that God is still involved in human history. And God is intimately involved in our lives. God blesses us and God guides of to repentance with words of judgment.

We don’t talk much about that judgment even though it fills the pages of the Old Testament (all that blood and guts). We explain it away, but we need not, because there’s not one time when Israel is disobedient and God brings judgment upon them that isn’t followed by repentance and reconciliation. It’s never about punishment. It’s always about reconnecting, about getting their attention. As often it is about getting our own.

Forget what some TV pastors will tell you the word *judgment* is about. It’s about a loving God, not about a God who seeks retribution. “The word of the Lord” is seen and heard. That’s what we’re saying. Think Moses and the burning bush. First he sees it. And then he hears it. “Moses, step back, take off your shoes. You are on holy ground.”

What? What is it? We really believe God is saying to us “Go out and be kind. Go out and be loving. Go out and do good things for people.

Bill Cosby spoke at the NAACP on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. You may have forgotten, but his speech was debated for years afterward. It ignited a firestorm of critics and those who applauded his incite. Here's part of what he said:

*Your church is only open on Sunday. And you can't keep going there every Sunday asking Jesus to do things for you. You can't keep asking that God will find a way. God is tired of you. God was there when they won all those court cases. That's where God was, because these people were doing something. When you go to church, look at the stained glass things of Jesus. Look at them. Is Jesus smiling? Not in one picture ... so tell your friends. Let's try to do something. Let's try to make Jesus smile. Let's start parenting.*

The call to all of us is to be active in sharing the word of the Lord. And good parenting is one way this sharing takes place. And I am convinced that it is impossible to be a good parent without "the word of the Lord." Do we really believe all that happens worthy of praise is because of the word of the Lord? Active? The presence of God? Taking charge of our thinking? Showing us again why we were given life?

Here's how we can know that the word of the Lord is active in our places of business, in our homes, in our studies, and in our relationships. The word of the Lord is patience; or patience is the active word of the Lord. The word of the Lord is kind. Kindness is more than just a disposition. It is the active work of God's word in our lives.

The word of the Lord is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. No ... the word of the Lord is the rejection of envy and boastfulness and arrogance—of rudeness in our relationships and in our hearts such as sometimes we keep it so well hidden that we are surprised when it erupts. The word of the Lord does not insist on its own way. That's our big paradox, isn't it? We think the spiritual freedom we have received from God is equivalent to man's free will. We couldn't be more wrong. The spiritual freedom we have is the active word of God helping us turn and go in a new direction.

The word of the Lord is not irritable or resentful. The word of the Lord does not rejoice in wrong-doing, but rejoices in the truth; the truth that can only come from that active logos, *dabar* in our midst. The word of the Lord bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Faith is the active word of the Lord. Hope is the active word of the Lord. Love is the active word of the Lord, and these three will always endure; but even as they do, the greatest of these is the word of the Lord in love—love put into deeds and words.

So the call to discipleship which we share with Jeremiah, and with Peter and Andrew and with Paul—this is the active call. Ongoing. The love of God which interrupts our routines, disrupts our five-year plans.

According to Joe Stowell who wrote "Following Christ," the only thing between following and not following Peter and Andrew was the desire to maintain the status quo. For them, the status quo was their nets. The nets represented security and income—familiar

living conditions, all the things they added to their lives. All of those things suddenly became less important than the love they experienced upon meeting Christ. And so, if they if they were actively going to share this love, it meant they would have to drop their nets. Continuing to cling to the nets would have been a denial of that very call that love had inspired—a call to stand up and follow.

How and where do we attempt to experience the active word of the Lord?—all the while we are dragging nets behind us and wondering why it doesn't work. Where and how do we think we can ever hide those nets from God's view? God's active word at receiving and recognizing salvation means at some point we have to let go of what we can create and release control of what we can manipulate—of what we think we can protect. God's active word of love requires that we really trust what we are hearing from this book, and what we are hearing from the word of the Lord in our hearts.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

Amen