

When I sat with today's scripture, I found something peculiar. The connection wasn't a neat, tidy theme. It wasn't like "all about forgiveness" or "all about hospitality." It was more like a feeling, a resonance, an invitation to hear God's voice in three different ways. And the more I turned the texts over in my mind, the more I realized that when put together they were speaking about the life of faith. More specifically, they were talking about our response to three of God's movements: rejoicing, calling, welcoming.

This question of "how will I respond to God's action?" was on my heart throughout our sabbatical. While I prayed for clarity and revelation, I often found myself thinking about our children.

Let me tell you something that both embarrassed me and ignited a delight so fierce it sometimes still overtakes me. I love how our children embrace life with energy and curiosity, how they walk up to strangers with bold questions, assuming that friendship is always possible. For them, welcome is just one smile away.

Whenever someone asked us on our travels, "So, are you on vacation?" the kids never missed a beat: "No, we're on sabbatical!" And then they would explain, with the most delightful pride, that their parents are pastors at a Mennonite church in Eastern Washington — near Ritzville. "Have you heard of it? Will you be traveling through? You should come to our church! Menno Mennonite. It's surrounded by wheat and potatoes, and everyone is welcome!"

Sometimes the invitation sparked a longer conversation, sometimes it ended quickly. But what never changed was the spirit with which it was given: always offered with joy.

And isn't that a picture of the gospel itself? God delights in us. God calls us. God reveals holiness that shakes us. And how we respond shapes the world around us.

One of my favourite passages in all of Scripture is Zephaniah 3:17:

"The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with loud singing."

Think of that. The Creator of the universe sings jubilantly over your life. The one who stretched out the heavens and breathed life into the dust of the earth... sings the sun to rise and wakes you with song every morning.

Friends, God doesn't just put up with you. God doesn't just tolerate you as one more cog in the big machine of creation. God delights in you. God sings praises over your very existence.

And this is where faith begins. Not with our adequacy. Not with our work. Not with our faithfulness. Faith begins with God's delight. Before we achieve anything, before we prove anything, before we succeed at anything, we are already loved and delighted in. God's joy is the foundation of our identity.

That's the first note of the gospel: you are rejoiced over. Now how will you respond?

Zephaniah's vision of God singing is only the beginning. For God's delight is not passive. It moves. It acts. It gives shape to our lives. And Jeremiah shows us this truth.

The same God who sings over us in Zephaniah also speaks directly into Jeremiah's young and trembling life, saying, "*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart.*" (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

Jeremiah was most likely a teenager when God called him to be a prophet. Can you imagine? A kid being entrusted with a voice for the nations. No wonder he resisted. "*Ah, Lord God! I don't know how to speak. I'm only a child!*"

And who among us doesn't feel that way sometimes?

When I first started pastoring back in Saskatchewan, I felt too young to preach, too inexperienced to carry the weight of pastoral care. Truth be told, I still sometimes feel too young — even though I'm now legitimately "over the hill"!

We know the protest. Maybe we have our own rehearsed, ready for when God calls: "I'm too small. Too unqualified. Too ordinary. Too much, or not enough."

Yet again and again, God chooses the unlikely. And again and again, God's response is the same promise: "*Do not be afraid. I am with you.*"

Notice what happens to Jeremiah. God doesn't say, "Come up with better words." God doesn't say, "Work on your confidence." God says, "*Don't say you're only a child. Wherever I send you, you must go. What I tell you, you must say. Do not be afraid of them, because I am with you.*"

And then comes that beautiful gesture. God reaches out and touches Jeremiah's mouth, saying, "*I have put my words in your mouth. Today I appoint you over nations and empires to dig up and pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant.*"

God never calls the perfect. Jeremiah's calling didn't begin with his ability. It began with God's presence.

God's delight is not passive. God calls us — even in our weakness and excuses — to participate in God's work.

Here's the rhythm again: We are rejoiced over. Then we are called.

God's delight is our foundation. God's call is our invitation. One tells us we are beloved; the other tells us we are needed in the world — how will we respond?

But there's a third part. To be chosen, to be entrusted, to be sent — this is no small thing. It will stretch us, unsettle us, and sometimes terrify us. Because the God who rejoices over us is also the God whose holiness shakes the heavens and the earth.

Do you remember the story of Mt. Sinai? The people stood before the mountain, and the ground shook, fire blazed, smoke filled the sky, thunder rolled. It was so terrifying that the people begged Moses to tell God not to speak anymore. Even Moses trembled with fear. That's one way to encounter God's holiness: dread, trembling, awe.

Menno Mennonite Church
August 24, 2025

How Will We Respond?
Jeremiah 1:4-10, Zephaniah 3:17b

Emily Toews

But Hebrews shifts the story. “*You have not come to **that** mountain...you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to countless angels in joyful assembly.*”

Do you hear the shift? From trembling fear to festival joy. From terror to celebration. From unapproachable to welcoming. **THIS** is the kingdom we live for. Not one built on shame and harsh judgement, but one of grace and hope. This is the kingdom we are called to serve. This kingdom cannot be shaken.

Yes, God is still a consuming fire — but not a fire that destroys indiscriminately. God’s fire purifies. God’s fire refines. God’s fire warms for the goodness of all.

This is the kingdom that cannot be shaken. A kingdom of fairness and compassion. A kingdom where Christ mediates grace. A kingdom where angels celebrate and saints gather in joy.

And that is good news for us, because life itself will shake us: grief, illness, change, doubt, the weight of responsibility. But when everything else trembles, God’s kingdom holds.

Friends, here is the good news: We are rejoiced over. We are called. We are welcomed.

God’s joy steadies us. God’s presence empowers us. God’s kingdom surrounds us. And so, we **can** walk into this world with a holy kind of courage — not because we are strong enough, not because we are wise enough, but because the One who formed us and delights in us goes with us.

What would happen to our faith, our relationships, our view of the world and each other even our church if we lived our lives as a response to our being beloved of God. What would happen if, out of our sense of belovedness, we begin to see others as beloved and called? How would we treat each other differently?

Let me leave you with some words of encouragement.

When you wonder if your life truly matters, remember Zephaniah: you are God’s delight. Let that be your foundation. When you doubt your worth, when you feel invisible, remember that God sings over you with joy.

And when the voice of doubt whispers, “You’re too small, too ordinary, too much to handle, or not quite enough, then remember Jeremiah. Jeremiah who was called – like you are called to live as followers of Christ, - not because he was perfect for the job, but because he was God’s beloved. God’s presence equips you, not your perfection.

And when you are afraid, when life shakes you, remember Hebrews: We have not come to an unapproachable God, but are welcomed into a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

This is the rhythm of the gospel:
Our adequacy is not the foundation — God’s delight is.
Our success is not the measure — God’s presence is.
Our fear is not the final word — God’s kingdom is.

Menno Mennonite Church
August 24, 2025

How Will We Respond?
Jeremiah 1:4-10, Zephaniah 3:17b

Emily Toews

Friends, do you remember the fearless invitations of our children on sabbatical? Their bold, joyful welcome? “You should come to our church! Everyone is welcome!” That kind of fearless joy is the heartbeat of God’s kingdom.

That’s what it looks like to live, work, and hope as one who knows they are beloved. It reflects the very heart of God.

So let us go from here as a people who know ourselves rejoiced over, who trust ourselves called, and who dare to walk boldly even when we feel shaken.

Because the truth is this: the One who formed us, the One who calls us, the One who welcomes us — is the same God who delights in us, sings over us, and goes with us still.

Thanks be to God. Amen.