

Hey Zoe,

I'm Drew, one of your pastors. I remember the first time I ever laid eyes on you. I went over to your house to take your parents some BBQ, and your grandmother from Vermont was visiting. You had not been home from the hospital for long, and you were so tiny.

We sat in your nursery in awe of your presence, and spoke softly so as not to disturb you. You were and are a beautiful child, and we are so glad you are here. I remember watching your parents' faces and the newfound love reflected in their eyes for you. It was a newfound love they had been anticipating for some months now as they waited for your arrival, and it was a love reflected.

I too am a parent of small children, and as we hold your tender young selves so close to our own bodies it is hard to believe that someone has known you longer than we have and loves you just as much if not more than we do. Yet I hear God's voice through the prophet Jeremiah and I am reminded that in essence you are entrusted to our care by the One who made and loves us all.

"Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you..." (Jeremiah 1:5 – *The Message*)

The story of Jeremiah is one of my favorite stories from the Bible, and I was thrilled that the *Call of Jeremiah* was one of the stories to be read on the day of your Baptism. It amazes me to hear that before we were ever born God knew all about us and had holy plans for us.

We can't fully comprehend that. Yet I do know that does not mean that your story is entirely written, for you have a whole life ahead of you. We get to enjoy seeing it unfold day by day. But I do believe these words from Scripture mean that God understands and knows things in ways that we can't even imagine. God knows and cares for each one of us intimately, and God calls each one of us into a life that God has been shaping from the very beginning.

Now there will come a time (or many times) in your life, when you'll feel like Jeremiah and want to say, "Whoa God! Look at me. I'm not ready. I'm only Zoe." When you feel like that, remember this story from Jeremiah and listen to God's words to the prophet (and I believe to us), "Don't say, 'I'm only (in your case, a girl).' ('Remember, I know you,' God says.) I'll tell you where to go and you'll go there. I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it. (I'll show you the way.) Don't be afraid of a soul. I'll be right there, looking after you." (Jeremiah 1:7-8 – *The Message*)

Not too long ago my wife Tamara and I went to see the movie *Hairspray* on opening night at the Rave in Vestavia. The theater was sold out and when we got there the only seats we could find were the last two seats on the end of the last row at the very top of the theater. I was amazed to see it packed with mostly teenage girls (you'll be one someday too Zoe). The place was literally bubbling, and after the movie was over I knew why.

Hairspray is a story about a teenage girl, Tracy Turnblad, whose dream was to get on the *Corny Collin's Show* in Baltimore. She loved to dance, but she didn't exactly fit in to the mold. What she found is that as she followed her passion and her big dreams, she would at times need to break the rules. There were traditions and values that needed shaking up.

Sounds to me like a story of call, of living into who God has made you to be. Tracy Turnblad found that wasn't easy. Jeremiah found that wasn't easy. And I trust you'll too find that's not always easy. When that happens remember these words, "Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you... I'll tell you where to go and you'll go there. I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it. Don't be afraid of a soul. I'll be right there, looking after you."

Those are heavy promises, and they come from none other than God. If I've found anything to be true in my life, it's that God is good at keeping promises. Zoe, this congregation is

also going to make some promises to you today, to guide, nurture and encourage you, and I've found them to be pretty good at keeping those promises too. You are fortunate to be growing up in this community of faith.

I've gotten to know your mom pretty well here as we've worked together on issues of urban justice and mission. Recently I've loved seeing your two redheads together as she brings you up front to sit on these steps with you on her lap during church. She, like I, is thankful to have found these people of First Presbyterian Church who are also willing to shake up traditions and values when needed.

That's part of our prophetic call Zoe, and it goes all the way back to Jeremiah and the Hebrew people. "Your job is to pull up and tear down, take apart and demolish... (I've found that the toddlers in my house have no problem with that part)... And then start over, building and planting." (Jeremiah 1:10 – *The Message*)

That is the ultimate holy plan God has for us all – building and planting a world of Justice, Love and Peace. At times there is some pulling up and tearing down that must precede the rebuilding and planting. However we do not need to be afraid, for God promises, "I'll be right there, looking after you."

On Wednesday night I went with some friends here from the church to the WorkPlay Theater to hear one of my favorite singer/songwriters, David Wilcox. It was an amazing concert, and he sang to us one of his newest songs, one I'd never heard, which is about in his own words, "that wily old carpenter, Jesus." The refrain goes like this:

Be the Mercy
My people need the Peace
This fight over faith won't bring them relief
I love them beyond belief

Zoe, that is the message of your baptism. God loves you beyond belief. That is the message of all of our baptisms, God loves you beyond belief. May these waters remind you that you already have God's love. You don't have to earn it, and nobody can take it away from you. That is the truth we claim today in your baptism. Your job and our job is to live into that love, allow it to surround us and let God guide our living.

And God is fully capable of doing that, whether we are aware of it or not.

Be the Mercy
"Before I shaped you in the womb, (God says)
I knew all about you.
Before you saw the light of day,
I had holy plans for you...
My People need the Peace
Don't say, 'I'm only a (child).'

I'll tell you where to go and you'll go there.
I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it.
This fight over faith won't bring relief
Don't be afraid of a soul.
I'll be right there, looking after you."

I love you beyond belief

God's promise to you Zoe (and to you and you and you...to us all.) Thanks be to God! Amen.