

“From a Nobody to a Somebody”

Jeremiah 1:4-10

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I don't know the plans Jeremiah had for his future, but I am confident they did not include a forty year career as a prophet. So startled was he when he received this call from God, he immediately offered resistance by citing his youthfulness and inability.

He lost that argument, though, and reluctantly embarked on this journey of faith that resembled a spiritual roller coaster. Jeremiah persevered in spite of all the obstacles he faced, and he is remembered as one of Israel's greatest prophets.

Today's text describes Jeremiah's call to be a prophet, which has similar characteristics to the call of other leaders like Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. There was a call from God for service followed by an immediate resistance on the part of the future prophet before accepting the divine commission.

I can understand Jeremiah's reluctance. He knew the life of a prophet was not an easy one.

One of his ancestors, Abiathar, was stripped of his priestly duties and banished from Jerusalem to Anathoth because he criticized King Solomon's ascension to the throne and policies. Abiathar paid a high price to speak truth to power, and Jeremiah knew he would, too. His calls for repentance and reform on the part of Judah's most powerful leaders could cost him his life. No wonder Jeremiah resisted this call from God.

However, Jeremiah also knew prophets were used by God to alter the course of history. Indeed, this occurred in Jeremiah's life as God used him at a pivotal time in Judah's history to influence a new, young king by the name of Josiah to usher in sweeping reforms and improve the living conditions of his neighbors.

I am intrigued this morning by Jeremiah's immediate response to the call from God to be a prophet. "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." He was convinced he was not the man for this job. He was merely a young priest outside Jerusalem

from a family who had no clout in the capital city. He was a “nobody” in a line-up filled with “somebodies.”

For his entire comic strip life, Charlie Brown was hopelessly in love with the little red haired girl, Lucy. All his efforts to win her affection were in vain, though. One day Charlie Brown was talking to Linus, lamenting the fact that he could not even talk to Lucy.

“I’m a nothing, Linus, and she is a something. If she was a nothing and I was a something, I could talk to her. If she was a nothing and I was a nothing, I could talk to her. If she was a something and I was a something, I could talk to her. But, I am a nothing and she is a something and a nothing just cannot talk to a something.”

After waiting patiently, Linus optimistically replied, “Charlie Brown, for a nothing you sure are something!”

Sounds to me like Jeremiah had an “I’m a nothing or a nobody” complex, which meant God had his work cut out for him. Persuading Jeremiah to accept the challenging role of a prophet was not going to be an easy task, but God prevailed. By God’s grace, Jeremiah persevered in spite of these pesky feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem.

What challenge have you just about talked yourself out of today? What opportunity to serve God has come your way which has struck fear in your heart and sent you scrambling for excuses?

What makes you think you cannot do what God has laid on your heart? Where is that negative attitude coming from? Who convinced you this cannot be done? Is it time to take another look at this opportunity and reconsider your decision?

This was precisely what Jeremiah did, and he became the longest serving prophet in Israel. His influence and impact are still felt today.

What call do you need to reconsider? What opportunity to change your world, big or small, do you need look at again? What could I say this morning which would persuade you to take a second look?

Then God said to Jeremiah, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’, for you will go to all to whom I send you, and you will speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

Perhaps I need to say to you what God said to Jeremiah. Don’t let fear control you and make this decision. Instead, trust God to be with you every step of the way, leading, guiding, opening doors of opportunity and providing the strength and courage you need.

If our faith is not stronger than our fears, then it is useless. We'll spend the rest of our lives bound by the chains of pessimism, cynicism and hopelessness. We won't even begin to tap into our potential and spread our wings. We'll withdraw into a prison without bars and succumb to feelings of despair. Worst of all, though, we'll die and bury with us unspoken words the world needed to hear, acts of compassion that could have changed the lives of our neighbors and courageous deeds which could have altered the course of history.

Don't let this happen to you. God has not given you life so you can squander it or selfishly hoard your talents, skills and gifts. God was as excited the day you were born as He was the day Jeremiah and Jesus were born. He began dreaming about the difference you can make in this world and opening doors of opportunity for you. Don't disappoint Him, and don't disappoint yourself and those who need you.

Did you read the article in a local paper on Monday about Kayla Kinker? She recently began medical school at the University of Kentucky. Six years ago Kayla was living in a homeless shelter.

She spent her high school years jumping from apartment to apartment, sleeping on friends' couches. She moved seventeen times while in high school.

At times, she lived in a one bedroom apartment with her mother and brother, where strangers came and went. Drugs flowed freely in this dangerous environment.

Kayla rarely had clean clothes because there was no washing machine in the apartment, and often there was no electricity. The computer provided by her school was of little value because it could not be charged at home.

It wasn't until she moved into *Welcome House*, a Northern Kentucky homeless shelter, that she found stability. That move kept her from dropping out of school and getting a job.

With the aid of many new friends, especially Jan Ferguson and her husband, Lenny, who was one of Kayla's teachers, Kayla graduated from high school and went to Berea College, where she graduated with honors with a degree in biology. Today, she is a medical student whose goal is to open a community health center to help children living as she did.

What do you think Kayla would say about the excuses you are making for not spreading your wings and using the talents, skills and abilities God has given you? What would she say to you about getting out of your comfort zone and taking risks? What would she say about facing your fears?

What do you think Jeremiah would say?

Is it time to reconsider your response to a call to serve?

Is it time for you to be the Jan and Lenny Ferguson in someone's life and help them achieve their potential?

Is it time to confront your fears with faith in a God who loved you in your mother's womb and has been excited about all you would say and do since the day you were born?

Yes, it is time! Will you let God help you?