

Jeremiah 1:6-10

“Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

I'd like to tell you the story of two children. The parents of the first child were somewhat mismatched. His father was unemployed with no formal schooling. His mother was a teacher. This child, who grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, was estimated to have an IQ of 81. He was withdrawn from school after three months and was considered backward by school officials. This child enrolled in school two years late due to scarlet fever and respiratory infections, and he was going deaf. His emotional health was poor. He was stubborn, standoffish, and showed very little emotion. He liked mechanics. He also liked to play with fire and once he burned down his father's barn. He showed some manual dexterity, but used very poor grammar, but he wanted to be either a scientist or maybe a railroad mechanic.

The second child didn't show much more promise. This child was born of an alcoholic father. As a child she was sickly, bedridden, and often hospitalized. She was considered unpredictable and withdrawn. She would bite her nails and had numerous phobias. She wore a back-brace from a spinal defect and would constantly seek attention. She was a daydreamer with no vocational goals, although she expressed a desire to help the elderly and the poor.

Who were these two children? The boy from Port Huron became one of the world's greatest inventors Thomas A. Edison. And the awkward sickly young girl became a champion of the oppressed Eleanor Roosevelt.ⁱ

As we read about last week the word of the Lord came to a young boy named Jeremiah. The Lord said to him, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”* Jeremiah then said, *“Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”* Catch those words: *“Only a boy.”* But the Lord said to Jeremiah, *“Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”* Then the Lord put out His hand and touched Jeremiah’s mouth; and the Lord said to him, *“Now I have put my words in your mouth . . .”*

Only a boy, and yet, a messenger from God. Here’s a good word to eliminate from your vocabulary starting today ... it’s the word, “only.” Only a child, only a teenager, only a man/woman, only an senior citizen, only a high school graduate; the world is full of people who did amazing things even though they were only this or only that.

Professor Fred Craddock has a phrase he really does not like to hear: “I’m only human.” When do we usually use those words? Isn’t it after we have royally messed things up? I gave into temptation ... “Well, I’m only human.” I failed to do this or that ... “Well, I’m only human.” I messed things up ... again. “Well, I’m only human.” That seems to be our excuse for all our flaws and failings, but professor Craddock says we really need to reconsider this statement. The Bible says that we were created “*a little lower than the angels.*” Jesus said “*I say to you, He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do.*” We are the crown of God’s creation. God sent His Son to die in our behalf, so why would we believe we are destined to not be great?

Professor Craddock suggests to us that whenever somebody we know does something right or when someone commends us for doing something extremely well, that’s when we should say, “After all, I’m human;” because to be human is to be created in the image of God. As the writer of Ephesians says, “*You are God's masterpiece.*”ⁱⁱ Think about that statement, “*We are God's masterpiece!*” No one should ever again say “I’m only this . . . I’m only that.”

As I said last week during Cataleya's baptism service, "Even before we were born, God fashioned us to do great things." Don't ever say, "I'm only a home maker, I'm only a student, I'm only a janitor, I'm only a senior citizen." God did not create any of us for mere mediocrity. Put yourself in God's hands and you can do more and be more than you ever dreamed possible.

Mr. Miller was just a local farmer who ran a small produce stand. Mrs. Miller was bagging some potatoes for a young man and the young man noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily appraising a basket of freshly picked green peas. The young man paid for his potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. He had always been a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. Pondering the peas, he could not help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller and the ragged boy next to him. "Hello Barry, how are you today?" "Hello, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank you. Just admiring them peas, they sure look good." "They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?" "Fine, and gittin' stronger all the time." "Good. Anything I can help you with?" "No, Sir, just admiring them peas." "Would you like to take some home?" "No, Sir. Got nuthin' to pay

for'em with." "Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?"
"All I got is my prize marble here." "Is that right? Let me see it." "Here it
is, and she's a dandy." "I can see that. Hmmmmm, only thing is this one is
blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?" "Not
zackley, but almost." "Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you
and next trip this way let me look at that red marble." "Sure will. Thanks
Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me.
With a smile she said, "There are two other boys like him in our community,
all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them
for peas, apples, tomatoes, or whatever. When they come back with their red
marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all and he
sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one,
perhaps." The young man left the stand smiling to himself, impressed with
this man Jim Miller. A short time later this young man moved to Colorado
but he never forgot the story of Mr. Miller, the boys, and their bartering.

Several years went by, each more rapid than the previous. Then this man had occasion to visit some of his old friends back in that Idaho community and while he was there he learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his viewing that evening and knowing his friends wanted to go, he agreed to accompany them. Upon arrival at the mortuary they fell into line to meet the relatives of Mr. Miller and to offer whatever words of comfort they could. Ahead of them in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts ... all very professional looking. They approached Mrs. Miller, standing composed and smiling by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket. Her misty light blue eyes followed them as, one by one; each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly, wiping his eyes. His turn came to meet Mrs. Miller, and he told her who he was and mentioned the story she had told him about the marbles. With her eyes glistening, she took his hand and led him to the casket. "Those three young men who just left were the boys I told you about! They just told me how they

appreciated the things Jim “traded” them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size ... they came to pay their debt.” “We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world,” Mrs. Miller said, “but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho.” With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three of the shiniest red marbles you ever saw.

Mr. Miller was just a small farmer who ran a small produce stand. Just like Jeremiah. Just like Simon Peter. Just like Mary Magdalene. Just like Paul. We could put an “only” in front of all of their names, but look what God did through them. Imagine what God could do through you and me if we trusted ourselves completely to God’s leadership. I don’t care what your situation is; one thing a Christian should never ever say is “I’m only such-and-such.” You are a child of God; don’t ever forget that “You are a child of God.” It remains to be seen what God may do through you.

God created you to do great things for Him, and not only did He create you but He gave you the tools you need to accomplish what He has in store for you to accomplish. Just like Jeremiah was given the words to speak you too have been given those same words. Don’t sit there and say “I don’t know

what to say.” I’ve talked with all of you and I know first-hand you all can talk. Some have no problem talking. The next time you feel the need to voice your opinion to an un-churched person; try to keep yourself under the discipline of silence. Keep your mouth closed ... and then witness. Just ask yourself how your life, your attitude, your personality, your actions, your relationship with God and relationship with others is saying to that person about the power and love of your Lord and Savior. Sometimes when you visit someone, especially when the person is having a difficult time talking, try silence. See if you can display Christian love, concern, sympathy and compassion without chattering about it.

Let them know what it means to be redeemed by what radiates from your life. They’ll figure it out. They’ll get the point. What did the ancient pagans say about the Christians? “*See how they love one another.*” The Christians didn’t run around telling everybody that they loved each other. It was obvious.

I remember the unchurched husband of a woman in another church. Her husband never attended church, but she was always there. She was a quiet, reserved woman, who took part in everything, but always in the

background, always participating silently. Oh, there were many people who had talked to her husband, urging his church attendance and church membership upon him. One day, he finally came, and eventually he united with the congregation. Sometime later, the pastor asked him why he finally joined them. He asked him “Who said the right thing to him?” What had finally convinced him? “No one said anything that changed my mind.” “It was my wife. She never said anything, I guess, over the years; she kind of loved me into it.”

As we heard last week our name alone speaks volumes. What does your name say? Let every one of us be slow to speak. Let our actions speak of our love for our Lord and our fellow man, and may the Lord say to us, as He did to Jeremiah, “*Whatever I command you, you shall speak.*” To believe that about ourselves is to unleash a host of powers and possibilities. Like Thomas Edison and Eleanor Roosevelt, those two young people for whom no one would have predicted extraordinary success our lives to can become something beautiful and good.

Let God touch your life and your lips. Today, this day allow God to take away those negative words which hold you back. Instead say boldly, “I am a child of God destined for greatness through Him.” So everyone open up ... and say AH! And let God give you the words to speak and believe when you have to speak God will give you the words.

ⁱ Frederick G. Harmon and Garry Jacobs, *THE VITAL DIFFERENCE* (New York: AMACOM, 1985).

ⁱⁱ Fred Craddock in *Ten Great Preachers*, edited by Bill Turpie (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 45.