

“The Youth Are Not The Future Of The Church, They Are The Church Now.”

Jeremiah 1 : 4-10

Twenty-five young teenagers are sitting at their desks in the classroom, minds focused on anything and everything except the complex algebra problem that their teacher is writing on the board. Suddenly, their daydreaming is broken by the word of the teacher: "I need a volunteer to come to the board and solve this simple equation." Immediately, students become deeply involved with books under their desks. Pencils suddenly drop to the floor. Eyes become engrossed on a page, any page, in textbooks. No one dares look at the teacher. "Jerry, what about you?" asks the teacher. "I know you can do it."

Jerry's heart sinks to the bottom of his new high-top shoes. "Why me?" he thinks. "I can't do this. I'll be humiliated in front of everybody. I can't do this. That teacher has it in for me for no reason." Jerry rapidly sorts through his mental file of excuses: bad back, flu, torn hamstring muscle, chalk allergy, dentist appointment. None seem appropriate. Jerry slowly drags himself to the board. "Come on, Jerry. I'll be up here with you," encourages his teacher. "We'll go through this together." Jerry picks up the chalk. His mind goes blank. Poor Jerry.

Most of us in this sanctuary have taken at least one algebra course in our lifetime. Now, I don't know about you, but I have long thought that algebra was invented by people who are demon-possessed. They made up all of those letters and brackets just for the sole purpose of tormenting humanity! Some of you would disagree, and that's okay. I'm just saying that I can identify with Jerry. I had a hard time with algebra! I thought it was scary!

If it isn't algebra, then it's something else. Each of us has been challenged to accomplish a task that seemed to require more of us than we thought we were able to give. Each of us has a prepared list of reasonable excuses for just such occasions. Each of us, like Jerry, remembers times in which refusal was not an option.

This is precisely what happened to a young boy named Jeremiah, about 627 B.C. in a small town just three miles northeast of Jerusalem. It was not the words of an algebra teacher that startled Jeremiah. It was the word of the Lord, in Hebrew *Dabar Adonai*. It was not a call to solve a complex math problem that Jeremiah resisted. It was a call to be a prophet to nations in great political, military, and religious turmoil. Things were a mess!

It was a call to "go wherever I send you and speak whatever I command you." The Lord did not ask Jeremiah to perform a relatively easy task based on a previous homework assignment. The Lord asked Jeremiah to shatter the complacency of an

entire people, “to break down, to destroy, and to overthrow” and while incurring the wrath of both his peers and government leaders, “to build and to plant” seeds of renewal and hope. This surely was an impossible mission, a mission that would definitely lead to rejection, beatings, and banishment. In other words, Jeremiah saw himself to be in serious trouble.

Poor Jeremiah. He tried the best excuse in his repertoire to get out of this awesome request: “Ah, Lord God, I don't know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” Notice how God tells Jeremiah that he has great value as a human being. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” Before Jeremiah was even born, God set apart Jeremiah for a holy mission. We also have been chosen in and for a deep, intimate relationship with God, from birth (Psalm 139:13-16). We also have been set apart at baptism; launched by the word of the Lord on a holy mission. Jesus told his disciples, and he tells us, “You did not choose me, I chose you, that you should go and bear fruit” (John 15:16).

Here is what we need to see: *All of human life is of immeasurable value.*

There is no such thing as a person becoming valuable and important only when they reach a certain age, or achieve a certain accomplishment.

God knew Jeremiah and put God's own claim on Jeremiah -- while he was still in his mother's womb! That's a pretty young age!

One of the mistakes that we make today is when we tell our youth: “You are future of this church.” We are telling them that they are the future, but not the present. It's almost as if we are expecting them to go sit on a shelf somewhere until the rest of us die off!

This is problematic! When we restrict our youth to the future and shut them out of the present, we are not only short-changing them -- but we are also short-changing us! The future can't wait. For the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of the Mission of God, we need our youth fully engaged in the church now -- not just when the rest of us belong to the ages.

And youth...those of you who are below the legal voting age...your place in the Kingdom of God is right now. Not just when you get older, get married, and have children!

I want to make sure that I go on public record as saying this: The purpose of the church is not to simply “be there for you” when you are ready to get married or to have your children baptized. Granted, we do those things but there's much more to it than that.

The purpose of the church is to turn people into modern-day disciples of Jesus Christ. And it is the purpose of everyone in the church to be an active participant in establishing God's Kingdom here upon the earth. Period.

We are the Church of the Resurrected Christ. We are not Burger King. To be a part of the church means to be a part of a movement -- the movement of God to reclaim this whole world for Himself.

The prophet Jeremiah was just a very young man when God called him to get involved in God's movement to change the world. It's no different today -- God is calling YOU to get involved as well. And you begin to do that right here in the local church!

Is it easy? No, but it isn't algebra either. Being a Christian is a lifelong journey of faith that involves regular worship attendance, as well as good management of our time, talents, and treasures.

And there is a retirement plan for following Christ! Did you know that? There is! Let's just say that it's "out of this world!"

A young woman was packing for her first year at a distant university. Until her very last day at home, she appeared to be eager to venture out on her own. Then, as the last suitcase was loaded into the car, tears came to her eyes and she threw herself into the arms of her parents. "All right, I admit it. I'm scared, too. I might not make it. I'll miss you." Her parents, who were also in tears by this time, presented their daughter with a plaque on which these words were engraved: "The word of God will never lead you where the love of God cannot keep you." That plaque remains prominently displayed in her law office today. "Do not be afraid ... I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."

Young people: You don't have to be afraid of being involved in the church. This church belongs to God, and God is the one who calls you to it. And to the older generations: You don't have to be afraid of letting the young people get more involved in the life of the church. In my own experience with people of all ages...young, old, or middle aged...I have found that most people tend to love the people who love them. So, if you love our young people into the life of the church, they will love you right back! I guarantee it! Love and acceptance tends to beget love and acceptance.

Sunday School teachers, I don't want to leave you out. Today is your special day, too. What you do is ministry. If you teach Sunday School, you are involved in ministry.

Specifically, you are involved in the ministry of training our children to grow up to be men and women of God.

When you were asked to teach Sunday School, some of you may have felt like the prophet Jeremiah. You thought “Why me?” “Why should I teach Sunday School?” You didn’t feel up to the task.

Well, I’m here to tell you that you’re in good company! When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, God had something for Moses to do. God told Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. What was Moses’ response? He tried to get out of it! He protested! He said, ”Why me, Lord? Who am I to do that? Lord, please send someone else!” (See, even God had a tough time signing up volunteers!)

The man who wrote most of our New Testament -- the Apostle Paul -- God had to go out and rope him in, too. God headed him off at the pass one day on the road to Damascus, and even had to temporarily blind him in order to get Paul to start seeing things God’s way!

No, ministry is one of those things that people aren’t exactly lined up for. It is something that is done at God’s beckoning.

I close with this: Youth, Sunday School Teachers, members of Christ’s church: God called Jeremiah way back when, and God calls each of you today. My question is: “How will you answer God? Yes.. or..... ‘Send somebody else?’”

AMEN.