

“God Gets the Glory”  
Jeremiah 1: 4 – 10  
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Three summers ago when I was the interim at the Winnetka Presbyterian Church one of my favorite elderly members dropped by my office and in the course of our conversation, TJ asked me how old I was. I told him I was 64 and that in October I would turn 65. Now I liked TJ, but I liked him a whole lot more after he said to me that he couldn't believe that I was that old. He thought I was in my late 50's.

Now I don't think very often about how old I am, but when I do – it occurs to me that being as old as I am now at 67 that it is an age that is associated with being “retired.” But, I am not looking to retire. I never was a person who was waiting until I turned 65 or a certain age so that I could “retire.”

I do have to admit that there are days when the alarm goes off and I just would like to pull the covers over my head and stay in bed. Or as I eat my breakfast out on our deck on a glorious morning that I just long to stay there and read my current book.

That reminds me of the story of the “retired” couple who were lying in bed one morning after having just awakened from a good night's sleep. He reaches across the bed and takes her hand and she responds, “Don't touch me!”

“Why not?” he asks.

She answers back, “Because I'm dead.”

The husband says to her, “What on earth are you talking about? We're both lying here in bed together and talking to each another.”

The wife says, “Not so, I'm definitely dead.”

Her husband insists, “You're not dead. What in the world makes you think you're dead?”

His wife answers, "I know I'm dead, because I woke up this morning and nothing hurts."

In our scripture lesson today God is calling Jeremiah into discipleship and it isn't old age that is bothering the young Jeremiah. Rather than claiming a "retirement" exemption, he falls back on the "youth" exemption.

Jeremiah said, "Lord God! Truly I don't know how to speak, for I am only a boy" (Jeremiah 1:6)

God doesn't buy it. In fact, questions of service, ministry and discipleship have no relationship to our age, young or old. Service to God isn't limited at all by the categories that we think are important: age; race; gender; education; disability; or economic status.

As for retirement, it's hard to find the notion of retirement in the Bible, and Tony Campolo says somewhere in all of his writings, that retirement is unbiblical.

There is a website called [www.2young2retire.com](http://www.2young2retire.com). It's a great resource for us "retirement" age folks; it is an organization that encourages people of retirement age to look at what they might do with the rest of their life? There are testimonies and stories from people of retirement age talking about what they are doing in their second adulthood.

One my favorite entries on the website is the **Top Ten Ways to Retire Retirement**; here are six of the ten:

1. **Retire the word "retirement"** from your vocabulary. Look it up: it means to "withdraw" or "retreat." Words can shape reality, and it's time for this one to go. Doesn't "renaissance" or "graduation" better describe your post-career life?
2. **Restructure your priorities** around what is most important to you, like deepening relationships with family and friends, service to your church, community, or to the arts. Now is the time to bring your professional life into line with your deeper values.

3. **Rekindle your spirit for risk taking.** "Do not fear mistakes," says jazz immortal, Miles Davis, "There are none." If not you, then who? If not now, when?
4. **Respond to new opportunities.** Remain open to the infinite possibilities that the world has to offer. Your full potential may lie ahead
5. **Recharge your system** by moving your body regularly. Walk, dance, swim, do yoga, take up hiking or biking. Find something you really enjoy and make it a part of your daily wellness program.
6. **Remember that the wisdom** to discover and act on your deepest passion is within you.

Jeremiah wants to retire before he's hired or tired. He wants to stop before he goes; to quit before he starts; to sit down before he stands up.

Not Dorothy Day. When she was only 8 years old, something happened that would shape the rest of her life. On April 18, 1906, the great earthquake of the century had hit San Francisco.

In that experience which only lasted 2 minutes and 20 seconds the city was devastated and young Dorothy saw people from all walks of life helping others: women cooking, men offering spare clothes, tents being raised in the rubble. What she felt as she watched became a vision of the calling that would last the rest of her life.

She wrote. "While the crisis lasted, people loved each other. It was as though they were united in Christian solidarity. It makes one think of how people could, if they would, care for each other all the time in love and without judgment."

Her biographer wrote, "Dorothy Day's whole life was prefigured in that one episode."

The rest of her life, 88 years, she would work out that calling that occurred when she was a young child.

She became a living saint, she founded Hospitality Houses all over the country where she and her movement of Catholic workers, cared for the poorest of the poor. They still care for them. It all began when

she was very young. She could have said to God, “Not me, I am but a child.”<sup>1</sup>

No earthquake for Jeremiah when God spoke to him. But the young man clearly did not feel ready for the task.

“Lord God! Truly, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a child.” (Jeremiah 1:6)

Jeremiah’s reluctance is understandable; after all, he is being called to speak God’s word to nations in rebellion. The Word spoken from the mouth of Jeremiah will have the power to:

“Uproot and tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10).

The calling of God is serious and important, but if we are going to offer an excuse to avoid service, it can’t be linked to age.

Of this, Paul reminds Timothy:

***“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example ...”***

That was the advice Paul gave Timothy, his young friend and coworker in the ministry (1 Timothy 4:12).

So when young Jeremiah cries out, “I am only a child,” we understand and might even agree. But God will have nothing to do with our age limitations. In a rather firm, clear voice the Lord responded to Jeremiah,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a child’... for I am with you and will rescue you” (Jeremiah 1: 7-8).

The Lord calls us all to be of service and the Lord is with us!

**WE CAN’T SAY** that we aren’t smart enough to be of service to God because the Bible says,

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<sup>1</sup> Elie, Paul. “The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage”

***“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards .... But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise”*** (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

**WE CAN'T SAY** that we're not powerful and connected, because God says

***“Not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth ... but God chose what is foolish ...”***

**WE CAN'T SAY** that we're not strong enough, because God choose

***“What is weak in the world to shame the strong”*** (1 Corinthians 1:27).

**WE CAN'T SAY** that we're not respectable enough because

***“God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are”*** (1 Corinthians 1:28).

**WE CAN'T SAY** that we're lousy public speakers because the apostle Paul himself admits:

***“And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 2:3-5).

So why does a Jeremiah, or a Moses, or a Samuel, or a David, or a Paul, or a Dorothy Day, or any of the rest of us accept God's call to service?

We do it, so that **God Gets the Glory!** It's all about **GOD**.

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we're use to a human-centric world where everyone who's selling anything assures us that it is all about US; me, me, me...

## **It's not!**

It's all about what God **GETS**.

We're the ones who spend, who acquire, who waste, who gather, who accumulate, who build, who take in — and while we understand the notion of giving back, or charity — God doesn't want a part of us;

## **God wants it all!**

Rick Barger, in his book, "A New and Right Spirit, Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Society," says that:

"In vital congregations, people see themselves less as belonging 'to a church' and are more caught up in the notion that they "are the church."

He talks about the meaning of church membership that it is not about having my needs met, but that we are called to meet God's needs.<sup>2</sup>

It's all about God getting the **GLORY!**

Praise and worship of God fills all of Scripture. When history is concluded, the faithful from every time and era will gather to give praise to God.

This is what the call of God is about: **living** and **servicing** in a way that directs the **glory** and the **praise** to God.

The good news is found in Jeremiah 1:8.

We give our lives to God's service —to meet God's need whatever that may be — and God says:

***"I am with you to deliver you."***

**God's Presence and Protection** – What more do we need? We certainly don't need to claim our youth or our older age as excuses.

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<sup>2</sup> Rick Barger, "A New and Right Spirit," p.38-39

Rev. Gordon Crosby didn't. After he returned from military service as an Army chaplain, he founded the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. in 1947. Widely recognized as one of the most innovative models of church in this country, over 60 years later the Church of the Savior is still doing creative ministry through 10 small mission congregations in the suburbs of Washington.

Three years ago, at the age of 91, Rev. Crosby preached his final sermon. Up until that day he preached most Sundays, and during the week made his pastoral rounds in the inner city of Washington, D.C. He still continues to ask challenging questions of himself and his communities about the new wineskins that are necessary to best communicate the gospel.

Very late in his life, British conductor Sir Malcolm Sargeant was asked: "To what do you attribute your advanced age?"

"Well," he replied, "I suppose I must attribute it to the fact that I haven't yet died."

We haven't died yet. It may be hard to get out of bed some mornings and we all have our aches and pains, but we are living in a time of great opportunity and we are called to Celebrate God, to Grow in Christ, and to Extend the Spirit ...

Joseph Campbell said:

*"One way or another, we all have to find what best fosters the flowering of our humanity in this contemporary life, and dedicate ourselves to that." **Joseph Campbell***

*"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger...meet." **Frederick Buechner***

Young and old alike – we are called to service this day, and every day – a service where we seek to meet God's needs and where we always give "God Gets the Glory!"

Amen!