

“You are so much more”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Jeremiah 1:4-10

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

Heroes, the great ones—and I don’t just mean the names recorded in history; I mean your grandmothers and grandfathers, your teachers and Scoutmasters, the people who make a difference every day—not a one of them was born knowing how special they were. Someone had to tell them.

O, and you better believe it: someone had to tell Jeremiah. Though he is remembered as one of our greatest prophets, even Jeremiah doubted himself.

Jeremiah grew up hearing about how his ancestors—a family of priests—stood up to King Solomon, reminding him that it wasn’t gold palaces God wanted; it was faith and love and care for the least of these. Every night he heard stories of their bravery, and every night he looked at that young, scrawny boy in the mirror, that shy scared boy who was no good at public speaking, and he thought there was no way he’d ever be as brave or as great. He knew very well what his ancestors’ bravery had cost them—kicked out of Jerusalem, living on the edges, in Anathoth. Why would he even want that?

All his life people had told him he wasn’t good enough—kids who called him dumb; adults who didn’t listen or care. The tragedy is that he believed them. He believed them so much that even when God spoke to Jeremiah, called Jeremiah into God’s mighty service, Jeremiah thought there must have been some mistake. Surely, God didn’t want him.

Maybe you’ve felt that way too; maybe you’ve let yourself believe what all those others have told you. Maybe you think there’s no way God could ever want you.

Some time ago the New York Times published an article lamenting the conceit of modern people, 70 percent of whom according to a survey believe their life story is worth telling in a book or movie. The arrogance, the article exclaimed! Until a letter-to-the-editor arrived, which said, “So that means 30 percent think they have no story worth telling. How sad” (Scott Hoezee).

How sad, indeed. And when you consider national rates of depression, abuse, bullying, and the barriers of poverty and discrimination, the percentile only rises. A whole world of people who think they don’t matter.

It’s a world I know well. I was a shy and nerdy kid. With a speech impediment and paperwork that labeled me as a child with special needs. And let me tell you: you learn to shut up real quick when people look at you funny whenever you open your mouth. But no matter how much I retreated into myself, it wasn’t enough to protect me—not from the boys who laughed at me, or

bullied me, or hurt me in some serious ways. Of course, that was nothing compared to what I said to myself.

So, yes, I know that world. As you might know that world. As Jeremiah knew that world.

It was there that God found Jeremiah. It was there that God did what Jeremiah could not: God believed in Jeremiah. God said, “I know who you are, Jeremiah, even if you don’t. I know what strength lies within you. I know what power, what dreams, what beauty. I know, because I put it there. I made you. I wanted you before you were even born. I knit you together for a purpose. And I’m here to tell you that purpose today.”

And what a purpose it was: to be God’s prophet, to proclaim God’s word, to tear down the things that hurt and grow the things that love. God knew Jeremiah could do this, because God would be with him, in him, helping him find the words, find his courage.

That is the good news today: Jeremiah may have doubted, but o my friends, God never did.

Do you remember what I said at the beginning of this message? I said no person was ever born knowing how special they are. Someone had to tell them.

Someone had to tell Jeremiah, and Someone did. The biggest and greatest Someone out there.

That same Someone wants to tell you today. And if you let Him, your life will change.

There’s a moment I will never forget. It was the end of summer camp for our Boy Scout troop. All the parents had gathered to pick up their children. To my surprise, my Scout Master pulled me aside and asked me—me!—to offer the prayer. I was scared out of my mind. I don’t even remember what I said. What I do remember is what my Scout Master said to me afterwards. He said that what I had done was really brave. He said he saw something in me, something special. And here’s the thing: no one had ever—outside my family—praised me for speaking before. No one had ever called me brave.

I did not know it then, but his words changed my life. Though I would remain shy and quiet and depressed for many years to come, his simple words (probably long forgotten by him) planted a seed in me, nurtured by others, that one day grew into a call to become a pastor.

He helped me hear what God was trying to tell Jeremiah all those years ago, and what I’m trying to tell you today. You are so much more than what you appear, so much more than you realize, so much more than the world says. Out of all the people in the world, God made you. God chose you for a purpose. God needed one person just like you. And when it’s hard—when you can’t even believe in yourself, God will be there, with you, to believe in you until you can.

Whether you are a Scout or an adult, you have an opportunity to believe—if not in yourself, than in the God who does.

Today, I invite you to tell someone: “You are so much more.” You are so much more than what the world has told you, than what you have told yourself. You are so much more than any label. You are so much more than your age, your disability, your wealth or poverty, your body size, your grades, your gender, your theology. You are so much more than the hurts you’ve given or the hurts you’ve received. You are so much more than you ever knew.

How could you not be, when you’ve got God in you?

I know it’s hard to believe sometimes. I know. But the good news is that, even when you don’t believe, God does. God believes in you until you can. **Amen.**