

This is our last Sunday in a series of messages exploring “The Rhythm of Life.” Over the last four Sundays, we’ve looked at growth challenges we face over the course of a typical life pattern: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and senior adulthood. Today, I want to bring all of these together and make explicit how scripture reveals that we are called to be of service to God at every age and every stage of our lives.

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Back in the 1970’s, one year before the first *Star Wars* movie came out, there was a science fiction film called *Logan’s Run*. [Anybody remember that? I was in 5th or 6th grade when it came out.] The premise, if I recall correctly, was that a cataclysmic event had made the earth’s surface uninhabitable. The surviving remnant of people had been forced into an underground biosphere. With space in the biosphere limited, population control was a necessity to ensure the sustainability of society. In the movie, society had agreed that when someone had reached midlife (36), the burden they placed upon society would exceed the value of what they could contribute. So when someone reached the ripe old age of 36, they would be “put to sleep.”

Logan, the main character, was part of the law enforcement system which tracked down those who violated the law by overstaying their time in the biosphere once they turned 36.

Four decades later, our society faces some dilemmas around the care of the aging, especially as the current Social Security and Medicare systems are strained by the mass of folks whose post-retirement years are often equal to their years of fruitful labor. How can our society deal with the increasing population of the “Chronologically Gifted?”

Some years ago, I read about a 73-year old woman who was in the habit of reading her medical bills closely. She noticed a surcharge on one of those bills: a \$70 charge for – “extreme age.” Given what I mentioned last week, that senior discounts kick in at 55 years of age, maybe 73 is ‘extreme age,’ though we certainly have many folks here well beyond that tender age.

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But Jeremiah isn’t seeking senior citizen relief when God calls him to be a prophet. Rather than

claiming an extreme age exemption, he falls back on the youth exemption. “I am only a boy” (1:6). God doesn’t buy it. And this is how we begin to learn that questions of service, mission, and discipleship have no relation to age. In fact, God doesn’t seem to be limited at all by categories we tend to think are important: Age. Race. Gender. Education. Disability. Economic status. And, as for retirement, it’s hard to find any notion of retirement in the Bible. Biblically speaking, Christians who think they can ‘retire’ from being of service to God are living in unrepentant sin.

But Jeremiah? He wants to retire before he’s either hired or tired. He wants to stop before he goes; to quit before he starts; to sit down before he stands up. Jeremiah wants an age exemption and/or a lack of experience exemption. “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy,” he says.

Jeremiah’s demur 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 “pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (v. 10).

This reveals how the call of God is both serious and important, but if we’re going to offer an excuse to avoid service, it can’t be linked to age. As Paul reminds Timothy, his young friend and coworker in ministry: “Let no one despise your youth but set the believers an example...” (1 Timothy 4:12).

So when young Jeremiah cries out, “I am only a boy,” we understand and might even agree. But God will have nothing to do with age limitations. God wants to use us at every age! In a rather firm, clear voice, the Lord responded to Jeremiah, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’...for I am with you to deliver you” (v. 7). And so from folks across the age spectrum, from Noah to Abraham, to Samuel, to the Virgin Mary, to John Wesley, to Mother Teresa, to Billy Graham, we see that age is no excuse to avoid serving God.

And yet pastors will tell you how often they hear retired folks say, “I’m too old to do that,” or “I don’t know anything about youth these days,” or “I did my part for the church when I was younger. It’s their turn.” Any or all of these statements may be

true...but they are no excuse to flee God’s call. God will have no part of it. *God will guide, support and deliver those whom God calls! And God will call anyone, regardless of age, status or other perceived limitations.* So let’s dig a little deeper into that, and I’d invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians 1 in your pew Bibles to follow along as we explore some of the excuses God doesn’t find acceptable...

First, we can’t say that we aren’t smart enough, or that we don’t know the Bible well enough, because as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:26-27: “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.”

We can’t say that we’re not powerful and connected because, as Paul writes, “not many were of noble birth... but God chose what is foolish...” We can’t say that we’re not strong enough because, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27, God chose “what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” We can’t say that we’re not respectable enough because, in the very next verse we read, “God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.”

We can’t even say that we’re lousy public speakers because as the apostle Paul himself admits in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5, “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.”

So why does a Jeremiah, or a Moses, or a Samuel, or a David, or Jesus’ mother, or Timothy, accept God’s call to service? Because the point is that it’s God’s glory, not our capability, efficiency, expertise, that matters. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:28-31: “God chose what is low and despised in the world...so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

So, it’s all about being of service to God. Living in the new millennium, we’re used to a human-centric world where everyone who’s selling something

assures us that it is all about me (or you) getting what we’ve worked hard for. But it’s not! Our Christian life is based on the fact that we’ve received more than we can imagine or merit, so our response is to make sure that God gets what God wants. And God doesn’t want just a part of us at one stage of our life and not another. God wants all of who we are at every age.

Because that’s the way we live – to glorify the God who has given all to us and all for us. It’s all about God getting the glory! Praise and worship of God fill 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 serving in a way that directs the glory and praise of our lives to God.

The good news is found in Jeremiah 1:8. We give our lives to God’s service – whatever that may be – and God says: “I am with you to deliver you.” God promises both his presence and protection as we fulfill our calling. So retirement is a false myth in the economy of God’s call. God calls anyone, without regard to human limitations.

If we are faithful to God at every age of our lives, it means that all of us who call ourselves “Christian” will resist the temptation to claim an age exemption. To be a growing church means that our growing older simply adds to the years of life that we can serve and glorify God more freely than when we worked for some other employer.

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I want to conclude this series as we began, by reminding each other of our Mission as a church: “We are a congregation whose hearts, minds, and doors are open to every generation in all stages of their spiritual life. Our mission is to love God, love others, and grow God’s kingdom as all ages journey together in Christ-centered worship, fellowship, and service.”