

“Only” is a weasel-word. At least, it is much of the time. People use it to weasel out of all kinds of things. Like taking responsibility for their actions: “*I was only trying to help.*” “*I only did what I was told.*” Or they can use it to get out of helping others: “*I only have a few minutes.*” “*I only have pocket change to spare.*” And last but not least, it’s a great way to weasel out of involvement: “*Who me? No! I can’t do that. I’m only a layperson.*” “*Only an amateur.*” “*Only a student*” “*Only a retiree.*” Or as we hear in today’s text, “**I’m only a child.**”

Yes, “only” is a weasel-word. At times, it might be appropriate. But we need to think twice before using it, especially in our relationship with God! For in our haste to get out of something, we can also lose out on something – something great, something meaningful, something unique that God wants to do in and through our lives.

In the Bible, we find many examples of this – people trying to weasel out of God’s plan for them. And looking back, all we can say is: Thank God, they didn’t succeed! For in each and every case, they went on to accomplish something amazing! Moses comes to mind. Gideon. Jonah. Some of the greatest! And in today’s first lesson, there’s Jeremiah.

This passage tells us about his call to be a prophet. We don’t know many details – where or when it took place. For that we have to use our imaginations. Jeremiah was young. We know that much. So perhaps he was doing his chores. Or perhaps he was on his way home after hanging out with some friends. No doubt, it was a day like any other day. But then suddenly: this powerful experience! God communicating to him in some mysterious way: **“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”** Jeremiah’s reaction? Very human! Immediately, out came the weasel-words! **“Ah, Lord God, I do not know how to speak! I am *only* a child.”** And that was not untrue. But still, God wasn’t having any of it! **“Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to whomever I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.”**

That was pretty much it. Jeremiah put up no further resistance. From that moment on, he was God’s man. He went to whomever God sent him. He said whatever God commanded. And thus, he became one of the great figures in Jewish history – certainly, the greatest in that dark and dangerous time! God did not call him to an easy life. Jeremiah faced more than his share of challenges! Nor did God’s call make him popular. Quite the opposite! But even so, what an amazing life it was! For God worked in him and through him to do something great, something meaningful, something unique – beginning at the moment of this call, even though Jeremiah said he was “***only* a child.”**

Looking back, this snippet of history teaches us a lot! Above all else, it teaches us never to use the word “*only*” with God! At least, not as a weasel-word: “I’m *only* a layperson, *only* an amateur, *only* a student, retiree, child, sinner.” Never use the word “*only*” with God. To Him, “*only*” is irrelevant!

And really, this should just be common sense. I mean, when God calls us to serve Him, does He not know who we are or what we’re able to do? Come on! Does He not know our strengths and weaknesses, our talents and flaws? Of course He does! God knows everything about us. He knows us better than know ourselves! So why waste our breath with such objections? God can give us whatever resources it takes to do His work. He can shape us into the kind of people He needs. So to say, “I’m *only* this, that, or the other – to God, that’s irrelevant! Instead of this weasel-word, what we need is faith! Instead of focusing on our liabilities, we need to focus on God’s possibilities! We need to remember just who it is we believe in! A God for whom all things are possible! A God of infinite power and love! A God who is able to do abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine! That’s the God we believe in! So count on it: if God has called us to serve Him – if God has called you and me – He knows what He is doing! Whatever the challenges, whatever the circumstances, He knows what He is doing! We just need to trust Him! Jeremiah did – with amazing results. When He calls us, we can count on the same – God doing something great, something meaningful, something unique in and through our lives!

After all, when you really think about the great heroes of the faith as they started out, how many of them looked more promising than we do? Truth be told, many of them looked less promising! Much less promising! I mean, when an Albanian peasant girl named Teresa fetched water from the village well, I’m sure no one thought to themselves, “Ah, look at her! One day she’ll grow up to be a saint!” But God knew better. And as Teresa trusted in Him, yielded her life to Him, God *shaped* her into something better – a woman of strength and compassion we know as Mother Teresa.

Or when a troubled law student named Martin struggled with his burdened conscience, I’m sure no one thought to themselves, “Ah, look at him! Someday he’ll become a great messenger of grace!” But God knew better. And as Martin trusted in Him, yielded to Him, God *shaped* him into something better – a man of faith and courage we know as Martin Luther.

The list could go on and on. Name most any saint, any great hero of the faith, and you’ll find that starting out, they didn’t often look real promising! Peter and Paul and St. Patrick. Not real promising! Mary Magdalene, Martha, and St. Monica. Not real promising! That whole great cloud of witnesses we call saints – starting out, they were *only* bundles of potential, *only* diamonds in the rough, *only* raw materials in God’s hands. Just as we are. But what made the difference was that they didn’t let that be an excuse – I’m *only* this, that, or the other. No, they saw themselves as this, that, or the other in God’s hands. That is the

perspective of faith. In God's hands, they trusted in Him to shape and mold their lives. In God's hands, they yielded to Him as He did whatever that took. In God's hands, they waited patiently, knowing that **"He who promised is faithful, and He will do it!"** Which He did! That's what made the difference for them. That's what will make the difference for us, too!

The challenge, of course, is to believe this. And that *is* some challenge! We live in skeptical times. We're used to fast results. Our mentality is more microwave than slow cooker. Our attitude is more Holden Caulfield than Luke Skywalker. Kind of a double-whammy, I suppose. But even for fast-paced skeptics, history leaves a trail of evidence – visible proof of what God can do when we trust Him and don't let *"only"* get in the way. Fanny Crosby was *only* a blind woman, but how God used her to produce some of the great hymns of our faith! Florence Nightingale was *only* a humble nurse. William Wilberforce was *only* a sickly man, nearly blind, hardly able to walk, yet God worked in him and through him to end slavery in England.

And how about one more example – one of my favorites?

- X Growing up, this man only knew hardship and poverty.
- X At nine, he was left with only one parent.
- X His formal education only totaled 18 months.
- X After four years of courtship, he only got rejected.
- X Repeated attempts at business only failed and left him in debt.
- X Six out of seven runs for public office only led to defeat.
- X But on the eighth try, Abraham Lincoln won election, and as the 16th president of the United States, God used him in a powerful way, which could and would not have happened had Lincoln let that weasel-word "only" get in his way!

Bottom line: faith isn't just believing "in theory." Faith is believing in fact that God is ready, willing, and able to do all that He promises – which includes working in and through our lives! Above the door of Luther's old house in Wittenberg, there is a quote from him that's worth taking to heart: *"Let no one give up the faith that God wants to a great work through them."* Whether it's great in the eyes of the world doesn't matter, only whether it's great in the eyes of God. But it can happen! *Amazing* things can happen if we don't let that weasel-word "only" get in our way! What made the difference in the past, will make the difference for us today. That's the encouragement we take home with us. Trust in God, yield to God, wait upon God, and be confident that **"He who promised is faithful, and He will do it!"** Amen.