

**“The Onlys,” or, “All God Ever Wanted Is To Be With You,”
Jeremiah 1:4-10**

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=jeremiah+1:4-10

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The story I have for you this morning poses a question.

We at Chilson are professed believers in Jesus the Christ as our risen Lord.

Everyone who agrees with that statement say, “Amen.”

Which means, that we believe and trust his resurrection and thereby the

FACT that resurrection is REAL and possible in this life; all who agree here say, “Amen.”

**The question then becomes, since we believe in Christ Jesus and
that resurrection is real, “What are we going to do with it?”**

Our history as a church suggests that this is what we do with it:

Song: “Are Ye Able,”

“Are ye able ,” said the Master, “To be crucified with me?”

“Yea,” the sturdy dreamers answer, “To the death we follow Thee.”

“Lord, we are able,” our spirits are Thine.”

Remold them, make us like Thee, divine:

The guiding radiance above us shall be

A beacon to God, to love and loyalty.

Okay, who is the “Church?”

Answer: the people, the “sturdy dreamers;” the community of believers in Christ.

Based on what we just sang, what’s the functional purpose of the church?

Answer: to put all clergy out of work; that is, to become so in tune with the Spirit of Christ, acting for the Christ in this life in the name of Christ in this life that you don’t need the likes of me anymore.

Do you think that I think that so far my job is safe?

Does anything get in the way of accomplishing this possible goal?

Well, don’t we all have some rather preconceived notions?

You know... predetermined opinions and attitudes about other people and how we and all those “other” people should live? I think it’s within human nature to make preconceptions about others, even when we know the barest facts about them.

Here’s a test: What description of a person comes to mind when you think of an “only child?”

Perhaps you are prone to view “only” children as self-motivated, bright, independent, natural-leaders, and generally mature beyond their years. On the other hand, perhaps your experience leads you to consider “only” children as spoiled, chronically lonely, privileged, attention-seeking and selfish.

Perhaps you grew up as an “only.”

In reality, those who grew up as “onlys” are probably just as apt to be any or all of the above descriptions as any of us. **For in own way, each of us are “onlys.”** No matter how tightly or loosely knit your family might have been, no matter how many sisters or brothers with whom you shared bedrooms, bathrooms, and sweatshirts, **everyone grew up as individuals with unique histories and experiences that made us into the people we are today.**

It is this “only-ness” that gives each of us our unique sense of self, and yet can also leave us stranded in a sea of only-ness. A drive and desire for separateness and autonomy defines us just as strongly as does our search for community and companionship. We are a vast global population of “onlys”...all standing side by side, but often times not quite willing to reach out and connect to the one next to us; thereby uniting our only-ness and building a community. It is ironic that as hard as we struggle for a sense of self, as much as we like to celebrate our real or imagined independence, we also can use our sense of only-ness...

our familiar by-myself, unattached, unsupported status...**as our greatest excuse for not taking action and/or explaining our inabilities.**

Song: (based on, "My Traveling Star," by James Taylor)

*Watch my back and light my way
My traveling time...My traveling time
Watch over all those running away
Old road dog... Young runaway
They hunger for home but are scared to stay
They wait by the door, they stand and they stare
They're already out of there
They're already out of there*

*My Daddy taught me that love can fail
So they say...So they say
Soft as smoke and tough as nails
Just gave up...Old waling man
Coming back home was like going to jail
The kids and the money and troubles and all
No he never did come back home
Never that I recall*

*Never mind the wind, never mind the rain
Never mind the road leading home again
Never asking why...Never knowing when
Every now and then... There he goes again*

*She had some dreams and some hopes she knew
My traveling time...My traveling time
And some ideas she'd worked on, too
Old road dog... Young runaway
I told her I loved her like it was true
I knew I should stay...I knew I would go
Run, run away...Run, run away*

*Run before the wind...Run before the rain
Over yonder hill...Just around the bend
Never knowing why...Never knowing when
Every now and then... There you go again*

*Tie me up and hold me down
Oh, my traveling time
Bury my feet down in the ground
Oh, old road dog
Claim my name from the lost and found
And let me believe this is where I belong
And shame on me for sure
For one more running song*

In asking, "**What are we going to do with the resurrection in this life,**" using our sense of independence as an excuse for inaction can become visible.

It is very possible that we can and do get caught up in the "business" of religion.

The Rumanians have two proverbs that I love.

The first one is: "God created faith, humans created religion."

The other is: "Before you can find God, you are eaten by the saints."

From the time of our early childhood until we close our eyes in death, we look for our hidden God.

And there is no shortage of "experts" eager to show how to find God, *THEIR* God, and *ONLY* their God.

I don't know about you guys, but time and again I have been disappointed by the God shown to me by the experts. Some of us religious humans can offer-up a God who strangely looks a lot like we do; and consequently, not much like Jesus. Personally, I prefer the God who Jesus spoke about; the God that he undoubtedly found. **Further, Jesus told us that he was the WAY to God and that if we followed him we'd find God, too. It's an old problem...finding God, I mean...so don't feel bad if you're still looking.**

In fact, in terms of doing something in this life with resurrection, Jesus said in John's Gospel, "I have come that you might have life and have it in full (John 10:10) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+10:10)."

But the Rumanians were right: Before you can find God, the saints really do eat you up!

The saints, (you know, some of those "experts") are those, often times complete strangers, who love to rush up to you, beaming over with joy, saying, "Jesus loves you! Give me a big hug!" Now, I come from a warm and loving Scotch-Irish family; affectionate expressions were common in our clan. But when the "Saints Come Marching In," I get a bit tense. To me, intimate expressions of love, like hugs, have the reality of true devotion in them. It's tough for me to give that to someone I hardly know and be honest.

Being handled like a line-backer "in the name of Jesus" by someone I don't know is like being told, "If you really love Jesus, you show it like this, and only like this; in other words, you love God just like I do or you don't count." Perhaps if I had the opportunity to share some good thoughts and feelings about Jesus with this person, sharing a common experience with him/her a hug would feel fitting. Instead, it feels like being nibbled-on. I guess I have not reached the level of holiness in the mystery of God that there are no strangers. I'm still looking for God.

Certainly Jeremiah stood firmly in this all-too-human tradition. Suddenly he is confronted by a God-sized mission. Jeremiah is Divinely-ordered to deliver a just plain depressing message, and, like us, he succumbs to the onlys. He pleads an excuse of youth and inexperience: "I am only a boy!," he says.

But as Jeremiah quickly found out, this "only" excuse didn't hold water with God.

It was, in fact, a whine that God had heard many times before:

-Moses tells God: "I can't stand up to Pharaoh. I'm **only** a shepherd.

I can't even speak well; I stutter!" (Exodus 3:12, 4:1).

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+3:12;4:1)

-When God calls Gideon to deliver Israel from Midian, he tells God,

"I am **only** the least in my family!" (Judges 6:15). (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=judges+6:15)

-Saul tells David, "You can't go out there and take on Goliath.

You are **only** a boy!" (1 Samuel 17:33). (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+samuel+14:33)

-Solomon, when facing the challenges of being like his father before

him, got cold feet: "I am **only** a little child." (1 Kings 3:7).

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+kings+3:7)

-When sent to Jerusalem, Jeremiah protests, "These are **only** the

poor." (Jeremiah 5:4-5). (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=jeremiah+5:4-5)

-When told by Jesus to feed five-thousand, the disciples protested,

"We have nothing here; **only** five loaves and two fish!. (Matthew 14:17)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+14:17)

-When we are called to offer resurrection to folk we don't know, who

live differently than we do, who we, as yet, don't understand and

thereby are scared of and don't like, we can excuse ourselves

by the oldest of "onlys," "Hey, I'm **only** human."

The “but I’m only” excuse can never stand up. Why?

Because we forget on whom we are trying to use this dodge: God.

To each halting, hesitant CHOICE, God has one reply...“I am the only God.

I will choose whomever I choose. You’re working for me.”

God doesn’t get mixed up and call the wrong number by mistake.

God wasn’t trying to get a hold of Hilkiah and reached his boy Jeremiah instead!

-God wanted the stuttering Moses.

-God wanted the leadership of Gideon.

-God wanted David’s slingshot.

-God wanted the mantle of power to pass to young Solomon.

-God wanted Jeremiah’s message to go to the poor as well as the rich.

-God wanted to feed a multitude on simple rations.

-As it comes to us, God wants us to regain our childhood curiosity and thirst for learning; to not be afraid to discover what we don’t understand about someone who’s different.

A THIRST for learning; you know, childhood curiosity...God knows we were all really interesting at age 4, fairly interesting at age 7 and phenomenally boring and potentially nibbling at age 35, let alone 58!

It would seem that God tends to choose the “onlys” on purpose.

In fact, God uses the “only” to make an only...the only voice of truth, the only beacon of hope, the only spirit of love, the only words of wisdom. To be such an “only” means to stand alone, stand apart, stand firm, stand against and stand for. But in each situation an “only” is called to stand, in every word and “only” is called to deliver, God’s strength is there as well... and God’s strength is always enough.

In Luke’s Gospel story this morning, you can see how wrong-hearted and wrong-headed it is to assume that an “only” cannot be divinely appointed to a task in this life and then divinely empowered to fulfill it.

When Jesus returns to Galilee and appears before his hometown crowd in Nazareth, the folks who hear him speak doubt his authority and dismiss his words because those listening to him hear “only” the son of a local family and “only” a craftsman by trade. In other words, they “only” hear Jesus.

Called by God to offer the Good News of the redemption first to his own hometown people, Jesus obeys. But when the unappreciative and uncomprehending crowd turns ugly and plans to physically attack Jesus, God’s demonstrates that Grace is more than enough. Unharmed, unfazed, and unencumbered by the crowd’s threats, Jesus simply walks out of that fruitless encounter and walks on to continue his ministry through Galilee and the rest of the world.

As believers in the Christ, we have each been called to give our own particular witness to the greatest gift of love, **the greatest sacrifice for our sake that was ever given.** Like Jeremiah, we each were chosen, called, to tell a really good story to a world that is either so self-centered it refuses to listen to the Good News, or is down-right hostile to the vision of forgiveness and redemption that Jesus offers.

When we become aware of the size of the mission God is asking us to undertake, we can come down with a bad case of the “onlys,” which, of course, include: only human, only ordinary, only young, only old, only half-up-to-it, only an amateur, only a few years left, only one lung/kidney/eye/hand/pick-a-body-part, only me, only this, only that. Haven’t we all at some time recited an “I am only” mantra about ourselves when feeling overwhelmed and under-prepared?

Instead of clinging to the insecurity of being an “only,” we need to take hold of the energy that our status as “the one” reveals. Try replacing the defeatist four-syllable message, “I am only,” with a different four-syllable mantra: “I am the one.” If you want to add the completing phrase to that mantra, that is: “I am the one who can do this for God,” that’s optional. For now, let’s use what we already have.

Try saying it with me: “I AM THE ONE.”

-Only one person...I AM THE ONE,

-Only one team...I AM THE ONE,

-Only one congregation...I AM THE ONE,

-Only one family...I AM THE ONE,
-Only one state...I AM THE ONE,
-Only one nation...I AM THE ONE,
-Only one continent...I AM THE ONE,
-Only one world...I AM THE ONE.

Song: "I Am Able," (based on: "Are Ye Able," #383, vs. 4)

"I am able," still the Master teaches down eternity
And heroic spirits answer, "Now, as then in Galilee."
"Lord, I am able," my spirit is Thine.
Remold it, make me like Thee divine:
Thy guiding radiance within me shall be
A beacon to God, to love and loyalty.

In God's infinite wisdom, and with God's infinite energy, God has chosen YOU, only you, as the one who can stand as a particular kind of witness, perform a unique kind of ministry, give a distinct understanding of Christ's presence here on earth. You are the only one God chooses for this task. **Only you can do God's work as only you can do it.** Together with every other member of the body of Christ, we make up a community of "onlys." I know this, because according to the really good stories told by the "onlys" in scripture, ***all God ever wanted is to be with you***

Song: "All God Ever Wanted," (based on, "All I Ever Wanted," by Santana)

I've been watching how you pout and brood
Doubt stuck in your attitude
Your thinking all your faith's a bust
Listen to the Christ he'll show you how to trust

Jesus taught us to remember
How God's loving is so tender
And he is the Trust and the Way
Give you doubts to Christ, he'll show you night from day

Chorus: All God ever wanted is to be with you!

I just got to get it through to you
That God's loving heart is ever true
Rise up to where your life belongs
Child you've got to know Christ never does you wrong...