

Suit Up and Show Up  
Reading from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 1:4-10  
Reading from the Epistles: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
Reading from the Gospels: Mark 2:17

Well known television narrator and host, Mike Rowe, built his celebrity by giving special attention to essential workers whose unheralded jobs necessitate hard manual labor and often the performance of unpleasant tasks. Dirty jobs. His long-running show, *Dirty Jobs*, featured onerous labors, both well-known and obscure, that are necessary, if not exactly enviable. The show highlighted hot-tar roofers, disaster cleanup workers, septic tank technicians, roadkill extractors, sausage makers, and something dreadful referred to as an avian vomitologist.

I doubt that rodent wrangler will ever make the list of most desirable careers, but I'm ever grateful someone has the constitution and will to pursue that work. However, even those who effusively tout their love for their jobs are inevitably met by distasteful, yet necessary tasks that qualify as the cost of doing business. Doing the work that needs to be done regardless of the experience while executing it.

Do you recall the movie, *Up in the Air*, featuring George Clooney and Anna Kendrick as professional corporate downsizing experts who are hired by companies to execute layoffs, informing employees that they are downsized, fired, or laid-off? Their job is the delivery of shockingly bad news to people unprepared and ill-equipped to hear it. Their job is to spare the employer the understandably visceral reactions of the fired (*How can you treat me this way; this is what I get for busting my tail for twenty years; how am I supposed to tell my wife I've been fired or tell my kids that daddy can't pay the mortgage much less provide dance classes?*)

The downsizing experts are trained to calmly set a separation packet in front of the shocked employee and offer pat platitudes that carry little to no meaning or assurance (*This packet provides all the answers you will need; The sooner you trust the process, the sooner the next opportunity will present itself; Anyone who ever built an empire or changed the world sat where you are now, and it's because they sat there that they were able to do it; Perhaps you're underestimating the positive effect your career transition can have on your children.*)

Some of you have heard that speech and some of you have given that speech, but hardly anyone would call such work experiences a perk of the job. *Up in the Air*, it's a great movie if you want to squirm uncomfortably and feel awkward for a couple of hours.

Even the jobs about which everyone fantasizes include unenviable consequences. For all the glamour and financial rewards conferred upon the Tom Bradys and Patrick Mahomes' of the world, I'd rather forego the G-force smackdowns that end with a sweaty 300 lbs. nose guard on top of you. For all the impetuosity and churlishness of the pop icon, the cloying and invasive tenacity of the paparazzi would be a buzzkill. You may love your work, but inevitably there are tasks that test severely test that love.

*Clean up on aisle 7! You want me to be the mask enforcer? If you don't meet this deadline, it will be reflected in your performance review.*

Every vocation has its horror stories. The kindergarten teacher, the mayor, the sideline reporter, the operations manager, the nurse could regale you for hours with the terrors of the workplace. I once had a church member who was a prominent, beloved, and undeniably high-maintenance

member of the community, and whenever Dr. Jean was admitted to the local medical center, you could actually feel the whole hospital seize up with tension, nurses negotiating shift changes in order to work on a different floor. Every job has its challenges, but after an exhaustingly rough day, what do you do? You get up the next morning to suit up and show up.

On the scale of job satisfaction, the prophet Jeremiah would be the poster child for the lower end of the rankings. He has actually been referred to as the weeping prophet, which upon hearing the circumstances of his work and reading the book, no one could say the weeping was unjustified. It was certainly not a reflection of his character, nor was it evidence of any weakness. To put it simply, if you or I were given Jeremiah's job description, we'd be crying, too.

Jeremiah describes his unexpected and unsought job interview, "Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and

to overthrow, to build and to plant." At first glance, it looks like a rather impressive job description. "Jeremiah, you're going to be a mover and shaker with the full endorsement of the home office. You will have the ear of kings, and those same kings will fear your voice. Your job will have historic, earth-shaking, border-shifting significance." It sounds like the kind of job that will send a pack of wannabes in search of a political action committee to fund an all-out campaign to wrest the position from any competitor. Power. Prominence. Agency. Divine endorsement. Sign me up! When do I start?

Yeah ... well ... Jeremiah may have been young, *"I am only a boy!"* Jeremiah may have been inexperienced, *"I do not know how to speak!"* But Jeremiah was not the innocent neophyte with no knowledge of what goes on behind the curtains in the halls of power. Jeremiah, of the village of Anathoth, a suburb of Jerusalem, was the son of a priest in a village of priests with ties going back to that original priest, Moses' brother, Aaron. Jeremiah's father, Hilkiyah was significant enough that some legends named

him as the one who discovered the Book of Deuteronomy during the reign of Josiah.

In addition, Jeremiah may well have descended from the priest Abiathar who served in the court of King David. But Abiathar, according to OT scholar Walter Brueggemann "was vocal in his opposition to the ostentatious self-indulgence of the Davidic house in its trajectory of economic-military autonomy on which Solomon had set it." So, Solomon expelled Abiathar to (*ta da!*) Anathoth. And get this, Abiathar was the great-grandson of Phineas, the scandal-ridden priest who was the son of none other than Eli, that legendary priest who had ordained the prophet Samuel, who in turn was the priest who would anoint Saul, Israel's first king, and eventually, David, Israel's preeminent king.

So, Jeremiah had been raised in a family "eat up" with priests and well-versed in both the politics of the Temple and the intrigue and indecencies of the palace. Thus, Jeremiah was no dewy-eyed idealist when the Lord called him to the role of prophet. Even before he began his work, he knew it was going to be a tough gig, certainly not to the extent it was to

become, but enough to know that any elation and gratitude would be disingenuous when the Lord informed him about his work. Judah/Israel was anything but the peaceable kingdom in those days.

Listen to John Calvin's (*yes, that John Calvin's*) description of Jeremiah's tenure: "By the commandment of the Lord he began very young to prophecy, that is, in the thirteenth year of Josiah, and continued eighteen years under the king, three months under Jehoahaz and under Jehoiakim eleven years, three months under Jehoiachin, and under Zedekiah eleven years to the time that they were carried away into Babylon ... In this book [Jeremiah] declares with tears and lamentations, the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people, for their idolatry, covetousness, deceit, cruelty, excess, rebellion and contempt of God's word."

So, day after day Jeremiah's job is to tell people in power, people who hold the authority of life and death over him, penalties, faults, failures, iniquities, warnings, complaints, and judgments that they don't want to hear and that foretell their downfall. What do you think the temple officials or members of the royal court said about Jeremiah when he wasn't

around, or even to his face? Maybe you remember King Ahab's reaction when the prophet Elijah approached, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" I don't think Jeremiah received too many invitations to join the gang for happy hour at the Sinai Saloon. Ostracized, insulted, rebuffed, ignored, and abused; always the outsider in an insider's world. Yet, day after day, Jeremiah suited up and showed up to work, but you know that over time the insults do take a toll.

So, it's no surprise when the Lord casually asks Jeremiah how it's going, and Jeremiah lets loose his frustrations. "O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long ... Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed ... Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?"

"Oh, there are days...", you may be thinking, days when you feel Jeremiah's frustration and despondency; days you'd trade jobs, responsibilities, or tasks with anyone; days you'd just rather crawl under the covers and let the world go on without you; days when the right thing is always the hardest thing; days when the proper and just thing to do is an unmarked path through a minefield. Everyone has those, *I'd rather take a beating*, kind of days. And yet, tomorrow the alarm clock will ring. Coffee pot warmed up, the shower taken, you'll suit up and show up to do the things that need to be done in spite of how you may feel about them in the present moment.

You are you and you want to do the right thing. But don't forget, you are also God's, and God will never force you to face the hard stuff alone. The Lord says to Jeremiah, "you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." As tough as the job is before him, and though he doesn't hesitate to express his job dissatisfaction along the way, Jeremiah suits up and shows up, knowing that his strength is in

the Lord, much like a similarly maligned Jesus who will one day pick up his cross (and our cross) and carry it.

Even in the midst of his most visceral lament, Jeremiah pauses to acknowledge, "But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail." Jeremiah suits up and shows up because he knows what he has been called to do. He admits as much, even in his lament, "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."

Why does he not just give up, run away, leave it all behind? Because he is who he is and who God has called him to be in spite of the abuse and frustrations, trusting, sometimes without much evidence, that God is with him. And thus, in Jeremiah, the complaints are drowned out by some of the most hopeful words in all of scripture. For it is in Jeremiah that we read, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." And it is in Jeremiah that we read, "this is the covenant that I will make with the house

of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

You understand this, right? I know you do, because I've seen it, time and again. I've seen you, time after time, do the right thing not because it's easy, and not to be a martyr, but because it is the right thing to do.

Perhaps you've seen the strange and serially profane drama, *Goliath*, with Billy Bob Thornton playing an alcoholic, burned out lawyer who in spite of his self-destructive nature cannot stop himself from trying to do the right thing. Early on in the series, the viewer knows this Indiana native living in a no tell motel in L.A., and in spite of all evidence to the contrary, feels a deep-seated call to do the right thing. Why do we know this? Because near the beginning, he's in that dilapidated motel room watching *Hoosiers*, and it is evident that he has the movie memorized. You know what I'm talking about, because if you love that iconic basketball movie, it's probably because somewhere within you is a yearning to do the right thing. That's what drives the movie. The storyline is the classic David and

Goliath tale of a tiny high school's basketball team beating the big city, big player teams in the legendary Indiana High School Championship. But it's really about people, regardless of circumstance or environment, trying to do the right thing.

You know that scene when the tiny high school's center, Everett, has the stitches from a previous injury torn open? Norman Dale, the stubborn, driven coach, whose zealous desire to win has been his downfall in the past; he screams at the doctor to patch Everett up so he can play, but then, walking back to the bench, you can feel his troubled mind turning toward the good. He stops himself, and removes the injured player from the game, risking loss for the benefit of the kid's safety. We love that movie because we yearn that our own better angels will prevail.

The tasks aren't easy, the road is often strewn with potholes and hidden mines, the irritations may be legion, but you seek what is right, not in the vain hope of glory, but simply because it is the right thing to do. It is your calling.

You suit up and show up. That's a phrase often used by the mother of our friend, Janet Goetz. Her mom is a saint I have mentioned before and suiting up and showing up has been her lifetime witness. For example: for years on hot summer days, she would put a frozen bottle of water in the mailbox for her mailman. Day after day, year after year. And not that long ago, Janet's mom, now in nursing care, started to receive a weekly visitor on Sunday afternoons. It was her old mailman. Janet asked why he would use his only day off to visit a person who used to be on his route. Janet told him really didn't need to make the sacrifice, but he stopped her short, saying, "It's my calling."

What is yours? Will you suit up and show up? You, too, have a calling. The road may not be easy, but you will not go alone. "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Amen.