

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sermon Title: "But Nothing!"

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A couple of years ago, I remember watching a video, a TED Talk in fact, by Social Psychologist Amy Cuddy entitled, "Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are". In this presentation, she spoke about the importance of posture, not from an etiquette standpoint around being proper – not about sitting up straight at the dinner table or anything like that. Rather, she spoke about posture from a power standpoint. In her research, she looked at how people stand when they are feeling powerful, like after winning a race, crossing the finish line with arms up, head back, chest out! They literally open up their most vulnerable spots on their body because they feel powerful! Compare this to someone who is feeling not so powerful, worried, or anxious, and they turn in on themselves, they hunch over in a non-conscious act of protecting their chest. They look down and some will touch their neck, again to protect a vulnerable spot. Now, knowing this, that how we feel impacts our posture, she wondered if our posture would impact how we feel. If we consciously chose our posture, would it change our feeling? So through some experiments, her research essentially concluded that how we choose to sit and stand impacts our confidence and our chances for success. If we are feeling weak or we are about to face a challenge in our life, it would benefit us to spend a couple minutes standing like this (arms up, chest out) or in what has been deemed the Superman pose, it will change how we feel and will impact our ability to face the trials of life and to not be overcome by them. Give it a try sometime. I know it may feel silly at first, but it works! And this has become very popular advice for folks heading into job interviews. Intentionally change your posture so that you put your best foot forward and have the best chance of success!

How we stand, how we physically present ourselves has a powerful impact on how others see us and perhaps even more importantly or most importantly, how we see ourselves. Still, this phenomena is not only limited to the physical posture one takes. I

believe it is also connected with the language we use when talking about ourselves. How we use our words to talk about who we are can also shape who we are. In our scripture lesson today, we hear about Jeremiah and his call into prophetic ministry - a ministry which would share God's word of hope with those who needed to hear it most - those who were suffering, who felt defeated, and may have even saw their identity as God's people slipping away as well as those who were turning away from God. Still, when he first heard this calling from God, Jeremiah's immediate response was essentially this - "but I'm only a boy." And with these words, he figuratively curls in on himself taking a posture of weakness or even defeat. A posture of "I can't". Then God calls him to stand up straight. God told him to not say "But I am only a boy" and in these words, again figuratively, God calls Jeremiah to thrust out that chest and stand boldly, for he will go where God is sending him, he will do what is commanding, and through it all, God will never leave him but will deliver him. Knowing that God is there, how could he ever say, "But I'm only" or "I can't". From there on, his posture was one of service and of strength, for he was following where God would lead.

When we seek to limit ourselves in the language we use, saying "but I'm only" or "I can't possibly" or any language that limits us and suggests a lack of something, this all becomes something that we internalize and eventually come to believe. We see this not only in individuals but it is also a struggle within churches when they use language to limit themselves. "We can't do that", "But we are a small congregation", and so on as we turn in. When churches start thinking this way, they turn in on themselves, start believing they are weak and eventually lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy. But these are the moments, whether as individuals or communities, where God calls us to stand up! To not limit ourselves based on what we have been taught by the world but to trust where God is calling and go. To stand powerfully and to strive for the success we thought couldn't happen or we feared or whatever. We need to not limit ourselves by saying "but this" or "but that" when God has a long history of saying "but nothing!" How quickly we forget that the story of Jeremiah is not a lone occurrence. God is

always calling people to live beyond the limitations they have placed on themselves to believe in something greater. We could think back to Moses who stuttered but was called to speak up and lead the Israelite people out of slavery. We could think of the disciples whom Jesus called, humble people to bring this great news to the world. And there are many more accounts of God calling others to not limit themselves but to believe that they are made for something greater! Don't limit yourself, for when you know you are following where God is leading and you are following those paths of justice, righteousness, and peace, it is time to stand up. It's time to take that power posture, whether physically or figuratively through an optimistic spirit, and strive on. Sure, our body language does not guarantee success. Still, we cannot start in a posture of defeat. For when we stand tall, it will impact how we feel and will start us off postured for success rather than braced for failure.

Now this is, as many of you are keenly aware, Super Bowl Sunday. Therefore, it seems so appropriate to pull out really my only football illustration. So I call us to remember the movie, Rudy. Since being a little boy, Rudy dreamed of playing for the Notre Dame Football team. But, (there is that word again - we can't limit ourselves!), he was a small person. And while others saw this as a limitation, Rudy was always hopeful and he strived with a strong work ethic and spirit. He took a posture in life that was one of hope and of optimism. He strived so hard to not be defined by limitations, of which there seemed to be many, but strive for his dream. And when he entered Notre Dame and found himself doing many jobs for the team but still not playing, he strived on because he was not defeated. He kept that posture of strength and perseverance, never giving in to defeat. Eventually, in that tear jerking scene when Rudy is put in the game to play for the first time and then carried off the field hosted by his teammates, we see the power of perseverance, of taking a positive posture in life, and of embracing a "but nothing" mindset.

Beloved People of God, may we too seek to have that “but nothing” mindset. May we do our best to posture our lives so that we are open to all the ways in which we are called to live out our faith and to be Christ’s hands and feet in this world. May that posture change how we think about ourselves, reminding us of our strength and our possibilities. And, as we soon approach the communion table together once more, may we too come with a posture which knows who we are to God – a posture that knows that we are profoundly loved. And if we are having trouble believing that today, sit up straight, put that chest out, put your hands up over your head if you need too, so that you can convince yourself that you are a strong and much beloved child of God! So be it and may it be so. Amen.