

“When the Job Seeks You”

Galatians 5:13-15, 22-26; Luke 9:51-62

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

March 16, 2014 – 2nd Sunday in Lent – Rev. Ronald Botts

MEMO

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Carpenter Shop, Nazareth

FROM: Jordan Management Consultants
Jerusalem

Dear Sir: Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All have now taken a battery of tests and have met personally with our vocational aptitude consultants. The results of the tests are attached and you will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service, and for your guidance, we have included some general comments about each of the candidates. This is provided as a result of staff consultations and should be of help in making assignments and determining supervision.

In regard to your submissions, we are sorry to inform you that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not seem to have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons with management experience and evidence of proven capability, especially among groups like the Pharisees.

More specifically, Simon Peter is temperamental and sometimes boasts of things which he may not be able to accomplish. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, are likely to place personal interest above company loyalty.

Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine authority and morale. Matthew is not trusted by the business community. James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings and may upset some of your more conservative supporters.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of keen ability and resourcefulness. He meets people well, has a good business mind, and evidently has contacts in high places. He is decisive, highly motivated, and ambitious. We are referring to Judas Iscariot and recommend him as your general manager. If all the candidates had as much promise as he, there is no telling how successful your efforts might be.

As you know the religious field is quite competitive nowadays, but we wish you the best in your new venture.

Sincerely, Jordan Management Consultants

It's amazing what archeology has turned up recently!

Often the attributes we think are most important in a person prove to be totally wrong when other standards are applied. Take money, for instance. Money is one of those things we tend to value highly. Money certainly leverages power. Often, however, we ascribe to the person of wealth any number of traits which they may not have. Expensive clothes, a flashy car, membership in the right country club, a mansion-like home are all indicators of success in our society. But, truly, they say nothing about the character of that person. They are as likely to be a scoundrel as a saint, and maybe more so.

We don't know exactly what Jesus was looking for when he chose the twelve who were to accompany him in ministry. Through the glimpses we get of the disciples we understand that they were persons of differing temperament and ability. They approached situations in varied ways. Yet, Christ saw something in each one of them that he was looking for. He sought each one out for a purpose. It might even have been that Judas did, indeed, have the most promise but, in the end, could not come up to the high trust that was placed in him.

Did any of these men ever consider that life would hold such an important role for him? As they went about their former lives, which of them would have thought that he would be remembered twenty centuries after he died.? Some disciples are even recognized as saints and have churches named after them. Who would have thought?

Some years back a denomination had a new church in this area. The second pastor to serve there was hard-working and conscientious, but progress was slow. Part of the difficulty was that the organizing minister made a number of significant mistakes, so Glenn first had to go in and try to pick up the pieces. In some ways it might have been easier just to start all over again.

This fellow was very discouraged and we talked often. He even raised the possibility that ministry wasn't where he should be. Then one day he received a call from the search committee of a church close to where he grew up. They said that, unbeknownst to him, they had seen a copy of his profile and wondered if he might be interested in their open position. Uncertain, but not closed to the possibility, he entered the process and was later selected to pastor this sizable congregation. Glenn went on to lead them faithfully to new levels of service.

Sometimes the job comes looking for you, and ends up taking you where you would never had expected to go.

In our Gospel for the morning Jesus is traveling along the road leading to Jerusalem. His destination and his destiny are straight ahead, and he's determined not to stray from the path laid out for him. There is where he must go to do what is needed.

The account tells us that someone comes up to him and indicates that he is ready and willing to join him. Jesus looks directly at the man and says, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." He answers the man's offer, but in an indirect way; yet, the meaning is clear... enough apparently for the man to back away.

Jesus might also have said, "To come with me is to follow the harder path. There will be no rest, no refuge, if you share in my mission and work. This is what lies ahead: sacrifice and not glory. Are you still wanting to commit yourself?"

To another person along the way Jesus reaches out and invites him to follow. The man seems to be willing to go, but counters that he must first tie up the loose ends in his life. He must see that his father is buried and say good-bye to his family. While these requests might seem reasonable to us, Jesus indicates that the times require immediate decision and action. The man considers the demand, but is unable to make the commitment.

Now I doubt that the decision to follow Christ has been put in such black-and-white terms for us. We likely haven't faced this now-or-never juncture point. We haven't been confronted with such immediate danger in sharing Jesus' ministry. Had we been any of those Jesus stopped to talk with along the roadway, I doubt that any of us would have been anxious to make such an overwhelming commitment right then.

Jesus made it clear that we have to center ourselves on God. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, follows up on this when he says, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To live by the Spirit is to be guided by the Spirit." So, following Paul, we worship God through our love and praise, and show our devotion through lives which are changed for the better.

When we join the church we promise to do two major things: to follow in the ways of discipleship and to be active together in a community of faith. If the vows we take are to mean anything, then we must be accountable to fulfilling them. This is not a lodge or club or some other social organization and the degree of commitment will be all that much greater. The question is not what we can get from joining the Church, but what can we give to God through our actions.

Some today hold that a person can be a believer while not part of any particular congregation. That was a fairly heretical view when I went to seminary. It always stirred active debate on campus. This line of thought may have largely been the outgrowth of the anti-institutional movement that was being felt throughout American society in the 1970's. Today it is often exemplified by the person who identifies herself as "spiritual, but not religious."

So, can you be a Christian, a member of the Church universal, and not be part of a congregation? Sure. Sure you can, but.... don't head for the exits quite yet.

It's quite clear that Jesus did not intend for us to live our life of faith apart and alone. Rather, he knew it had to be experienced in community. Isolation does really grow disciples; it takes engagement. It's more feet on the ground than floating out in space. The truth is we need others, and they need us. There are some things which must be done together.

At the base of all this is an understanding that we don't really choose to follow Jesus or to become part of a church. It is really Jesus who chooses us. Christ seeks you out for the job he has for you, and you alone. Your life is precious to him, but should you decide to stay put where you are, he must and will continue on with his journey. Jesus initiates the pace and direction for us, and not the other way around. Jesus never stops loving us, but he alone sets the terms of discipleship.

"Come and follow me," Jesus conveys, "and I will show you the way of fulfillment. Come and discover that in giving you really find, in making others happy you find your happiness, in sacrifice you discover reward. Whatever you are called to expend, you will be paid back a hundred times, a thousand times. Come today, come tomorrow, come every day of your life, for I have chosen you to be at my side and to share my presence with you.

"Will you come? Are you ready?"