

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 6, 2013

"Serve without Fuss."

Luke 17:1-10

In one of his books, Chuck Swindoll tells about a lady who wanted desperately to go on a tour in Israel. But she wanted a sign to confirm that it was God's will. The morning after she began planning the trip, she woke up at 7:47 a.m. The tour group to Israel was planning on flying over on a 747 jet. That was her "sign" that confirmed God was going to bless this trip.

Another young man needed to buy a car. But he wanted to know that whatever car he bought was in God's will for him. One night he had a dream in which everything he saw was yellow. The next day he went to a car dealership and bought the "yellowest" car he could find. True to the form, the car was a real lemon.

And there was the deacon who wanted to be a pastor, but he didn't want to spend a few years at seminary. Would God approve of him buying a fake seminary degree from an online degree mill? The deacon concluded this was certainly God's will after he read First Timothy 3:13 from the King James Version. It read like this: "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree..."

These well-meaning people looking for a sign remind me of Jesus' disciples asking him for more faith in our Scripture today. Already, in Luke 9, the Lord had given them the power and authority to heal and to cast out demons. You would think this would be enough. They were with Jesus daily. They saw miracles that would make our hearts stand still. And they wanted more faith? What more could Jesus possibly give them? The answer is, he doesn't give them anything more. Notice how Jesus answers their request. He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

I believe he is saying to them and to us, "Your problem really isn't lack of faith. It doesn't take much faith to do sensational things. What it takes is commitment. What it takes is determination, and persistence and a will to see it through to the end."

To those of you who can remember back to the 1940s, there was a football player at Ohio State named Bucky Wertz. Wertz was a "walk-on" linebacker who stood only 5-feet, 6-inches tall. When he showed up for the first practice the coach was shocked. Bucky was too small to play linebacker. They would kill him. At the end of practice, the coach told Bucky he couldn't play. The next day, Bucky was back in uniform. Coach called him over and said, "I told you I had cut you from the squad. You are too small; these guys will kill you." With a firm, committed voice, Bucky said, "Coach, with due respect, you nor anyone else can prevent me from playing football for my school." The coach was shocked. He allowed Bucky to stay on the squad.

Bucky turned out to be the best tackler on the squad. Fast as lightning, sure on his feet, he would burst through the line and hit the ball carrier before he could get started. Still, he was too small, the coaches agreed. They didn't want him to get hurt. In the third game of the season, after the game was "in the bag," the coach sent Bucky in. He made every tackle the rest of the game. He started every game for the rest of the season and led the team in tackles.

The next season Bucky grew to 5-feet, 8-inches, weighed in at 168 pounds, and again led the team in tackles. Every season, junior and senior years, was the same.

On January 1, 1950, Ohio State played USC in the Rose Bowl. USC had an All-American fullback, weighing 240 pounds, who was the finest running back in the nation. Bucky was assigned to "rover" this fullback. The fullback never gained a yard. Bucky hit him behind the line every time he had the ball. Ohio State won in a shocking upset.

A little faith and a lot of hard work made Bucky Wertz a champion. The problem, Jesus was saying to his disciples, is not that you have too little faith. The problem is that you are not applying the faith you have. Then Jesus tells them a strange little parable. He says, "Suppose one of you has a servant who's been plowing or looking after sheep. When that servant comes in from work would you say to the servant, 'Come along now and sit down to eat?' Not likely. You would probably say, 'Prepare my supper, get

yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink.' Then after dinner would you thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?" Then Jesus adds these interesting words, "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

Here is a teaching that is so out of step with our times that it will take some interpretation. Jesus lived in a world in which slavery was a fact of life. In such a world, if the master of the house saw a servant in the field, he would not say to him, "Come on in and get cleaned up, while I fix you some dinner." No, he would say, "When you finish your work, come in and prepare my meal, I'm getting hungry." then after he had eaten the meal he would not have gone out of his way to thank the servant, nor would the servant expect to be thanked. After all, he had simply done his duty.

You and I would not fare well in such a culture. We like to be appreciated for our work. We like to be patted on the back, rewarded. We would not like being a faceless servant. We don't want to disappear into the woodwork. We like people to recognize us when we've done a good job, to say, "well done," or even, on occasion, to give us extravagant praise. In fact there was an article in a leading magazine some time back about the challenge many companies have today giving their younger workers constant positive reinforcement. Because of the high self-esteem movement, that is what many of today's young adults have gotten at home and in school from the day they were born. "You're the greatest! There's never been anyone like you before." It's getting hard for people in our society to imagine doing anything simply and solely because it's our duty.

When you send in that small fortune to pay your utilities, you don't expect a letter back from the president of the power company saying, "Well done, You paid on time! Super job! Keep up the good work! We're proud of you!" No, we pay our bill because it's our responsibility, especially if we don't want our lights shut off. Or when we pay our taxes, we don't get a letter from the IRS saying, "You are a super citizen. We wish we had ten million more like you." No, we pay our taxes because that is our duty as citizens. So, also, says Jesus, when we serve God, we are only doing our duty. We don't deserve any special award. Neither do we need any special gift to carry out our work. We don't need any special spiritual insights. We don't even need an abundance of faith. What we need is to show up willing to do our part. The truth of the matter is that how many people want to serve today--when it's convenient for them, when it's within their area of expertise, when they can receive recognition and appreciation.

Servant hood is really an alien concept for many of us. If I were to ask you what it would really mean for you to take up a cross and carry it, many of you would look at me like I was from Mars. The disciples thought their problem was that they lacked faith. Jesus told them that was not the problem. The problem was a lack of commitment. At times that's our problem too, isn't it?

When you're a child and a teenager, you serve. when you're in your twenties and begin life and start a family, you serve. When you're in your thirties and forties, you serve. When you're middle age, you serve. When you're in your sixties and seventies and starting to retire, you serve. When you move into your eighties and start to slow down, you serve. When you get sick, you serve. When you're dying, you serve. On your last day, as you die, you serve. You serve without fuss. Sometimes with very little recognition and not a lot of glory. It's only when you pass over to the other side, to be received into the arms of Jesus that you hear those ultimate words of commendation. "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come, share my joy."

That's who we are--servants. We serve because there was One who first served us. We are not seeking to work our way into heaven. That is already taken care of because of what Christ did on the cross. But our salvation came about long ago when the Lord of all the universe was willing to take upon himself the role of a servant. Now God calls us to service. Not because it will look good on our resume, not because we will be praised for it, but because that's who we are. Sons and daughters of the Most High.

The disciples asked for more faith. There is no record that Jesus granted their request. They didn't need more faith. What they need was simply to show up for duty. He would give them what they needed, but first they needed to show up. They needed to say with Isaiah the prophet, "Here am I, send me."