

ALL IT TAKES IS ALL YOU HAVE
Deuteronomy 10:12-16; Matthew 16:21-26
The Rev. Bob Knowles
Sunday, July 9, 2006

The sermon title is not the introduction to a new, simplified income tax form purported to be worded thusly: How much is your income? How much did you spend? How much do you have left? Send it in!

Certainly there are costs involved in being a citizen of the United States, and sometimes it seems as though the tax people want everything we have. But we still have a high standard of living where former luxuries have become necessities. And during these turbulent times, we are beginning to realize more and more what the costs of freedom really are, and not just in monetary terms.

Also, this is not a sermon about money as such. But it is a sermon related to Stewardship that has to do with total commitment. In the Preamble to the constitution of the Elon Community Church are these words:

“...we covenant together to attend the services of the church, to contribute according to our means for its support, to labor together to maintain its peace and harmony and so far as possible in every way to promote its temporal and spiritual welfare”.

These words are essentially those adopted at the founding of this church on April 19, 1891 and are very much in accord with a definition of Stewardship which involves “doing what we can, with what we have, wherever we are to meet the needs of others in the name of Christ.” And all it takes is all you have.

In our Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy, the affirmation is made

“O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees.”

All it takes is all you have!

We find a similar injunction in Micah 6:8

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

And remember Isaiah’s response to God who asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Though initially reluctant, Isaiah finally said, “Here am I, send me!”

What does it take to live fully according to God’s will? The early Disciples had to grapple with this question just as you and I have to today. And we, like they, take our cue from our Lord. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The Cross of Christ sometimes involves the ultimate sacrifice: one’s own death for the sake of others; but its basic meaning has to do with obedience. Carrying the Cross means the price each pays for loyalty to Christ and His principles, for total commitment to God’s will. All it takes is all you have!

The greatest single opportunity for a human being is to risk, to set aside everything else in order to follow Jesus. The Gospels say of the Disciples: "Immediately they left their nets and followed Him." We are all called by Christ to follow Him. He calls us to a radical state of change – from our lifestyles to His way of life. He calls us to a renewed life from which we can never return once we are fully committed to it. He calls us to new visions and values – to new life in Him. Have you ever decided to follow Jesus sometime, somewhere in your life, and then did you get the feeling that you were becoming involved in something much more than you had intended? Then what did you do? Sort of duck? How does it feel to be reminded that Jesus is actually and always calling you...just the way you are? How will you respond to His call?

Lois Rensberger in "Alive Now" puts a possible response in these words:

"and the Lord said "Go" and I said "Who, me?" and He said "Yes, you"
And I said "But I'm not ready yet; and there is company coming, and I can't leave the kids. You know there is no one to take my place". And the Lord said, "Go".
And I said, "But I don't want to." And He said "I didn't ask if you wanted to".
And I said, "Listen, I'm not the kind of person to get involved in controversy. Besides, my family wouldn't like it, And what will the neighbors think?" and He said "Baloney!"
and yet a third time the Lord said. "Go!" and I said "Do I have to?"
And He said "Do you love me?" and I said "Look, I'm scared. People are going to hate me and cut me up into little pieces. I can't take it all by myself."
And He said, "Where do you think I'll be?"
and the Lord said "GO!" and I sighed, "Here am I, send me."

Not quite up there with the Prophet Isaiah, but sometimes even reluctant acquiescence can be used by God to accomplish His purposes.

There are those, however, who have committed wholeheartedly to the Lord's call to service. Consider Mother Teresa – Sisters of Mercy. Millard Fuller –Habitat for Humanity, Eunice Kennedy Shriver – Special Olympics, David Robinson, NBA – Carver Academy, Missionaries, Evangelist, Philanthropists, Countless saints of the church who labor quietly day-by-day for His sake. All who have share a vision similar to that expressed by John Henry Newman:

God has created ME to do HIM some definite service. He has committed some work to ME which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I have a part in a great work: I am a link in the chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created ME for naught. I shall do GOOD. I shall do HIS WORK!

A most important thing to remember is that not one of us is the only one responding to Christ's call to love and service. We are the Church, called to be the corporate Body of Christ in the world, proclaiming the Gospel with power, comforting the afflicted in spirit, mind and body, securing justice for the oppressed, serving humanity in practical and

tangible ways, to carry out God's Will for His world by effecting changes for good in the lives of individuals and in the culture in which we exist.

The local church fits into the total mission of the Church in the World by witnessing to its Lord and by serving as the Body of Christ in its own community, in, but not of, the world, immersed but not submerged in its culture, infiltrating and leavening its institutions and organizations. No easy task, to be sure; but an important and crucial one. Do you and I have what it takes? All it takes is all we have.

When Christ speaks, saying, "I need you." What is one such as I to do? Run and hide? But where, but where? Turn where I will and He is there. Or deafness feign – "I did not hear." I lie, I know that He is near Christ will be heard; His voice breaks through. I hear Him saying, "I need you."

When Christ speaks, saying, "Sinner, come." Why should my heart be stricken numb? HE can't mean me; my life is pure; but then, again, I'm not so sure. I look within, and there I see a devil looking out at me. I cannot cry out; my voice is dumb. But still Christ calls, "Sinner, come".

And when Christ speaks, saying "Follow me" What then is my life to be? Safe, secure, a mountain-top high? Remote from the needy passing by? Or will it mean taking up His Cross, To know rejection, suffering, loss? Have I the strength to do His will? He speaks. My troubled heart is still.

So when Christ speaks, saying, "Disciple, Go!" How can anyone say, "No"? I struggle not to press my claim, To own my will yet hold His name. My life is not my own to use; There is no other path to choose Except the one His followers know Who hear Christ say, "Disciple, Go!"