

Community Church of Issaquah

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Whose Job Is It, Anyway?

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Growing up as one of five siblings all close in age, our household was very structured by our two parents, both of whom worked to keep us fed and clothed. If I were to try to explain how each of us five kids had certain jobs at home, it would be fairly complicated. Suffice it to say, each of us had our “to do” list of responsibilities from washing the dishes from a meal to vacuuming, to washing clothes and hanging them on the outside clothesline and a great deal more. When one of us got tired of doing our tasks, we could switch with another and do something different. I’m not positive, but I don’t think large family function like that anymore. The structure of having certain responsibilities in a church could perhaps be compared to that of my childhood. I’ll come back to that in a few minutes.

Now, on to the Bible. When Jesus stood with the 11 disciples just before he ascended into Heaven to join his Father, his instructions were very clear to those men who had been chosen as foundational leaders in an entirely new religious movement that was in its infancy stage at that time. The familiar passage says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have

commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Oddly, that mandate is the last verse in Matthew’s Gospel. There isn’t any more mention of what those 11 men did after that encounter with the risen Christ. Yet history tells us that each of them took Jesus to be serious at what he said and went into many different regions of the known world and served as evangelists and founders of faith communities. These men laid the foundation for what became the Christian religion. I suppose we could call them missionaries in today’s terms.

Yet, it was not only these 11 who took on the work that Jesus began and had to leave much too soon. In the second selected scriptures for today, we encounter other strong individuals who made an incredible impact on the growth of the Church of Christ, our Christian faith. Men like Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled hundreds of miles preaching and beginning churches all over what we know now as the Middle Eastern Region, Asia Minor and Southern Europe. The letters that Paul wrote to the churches of Thessalonica are powerful in their message and are likely the first epistles Paul wrote to any churches. These letters also came before the Gospels were written.

When we read the verses, we are deeply impressed with the praise and warnings Paul has written to a growing group of believers in a city ruled by Roman power and strong Jewish leaders. They were experiencing persecution and pressure

to disband and continue in the beliefs that contradicted the teachings of Christ. That's a message churches today need to hear. Yet, there is another aspect of this story of Thessalonica that you might miss. Let me tell you a bit about it.

Though Paul wrote the letters to the entire church of Thessalonica with the intent that it be read aloud to them, the letters were given to one specific person, a man named Jason. It was at his home that Paul, Silas and Timothy stayed while they were preaching and sharing in synagogue and elsewhere. When the town council and Jewish leaders wanted to put a stop to this, Jason was the one who was arrested and jailed. Paul and Silas had to flee in the middle of the night to avoid arrest. This entire episode centers on a man little of us know or have studied.

Have you ever thought about the fact that even though the disciples and others like Paul were extremely faithful in fulfilling the mission Jesus gave, and even though they worked night and day to preach the Word of Christ, it was not a solo task. Paul, on each of his missionary journeys was a powerful leader, but when he founded a church wherever he went, it was those that were left to lead and grow the churches that did the work after his visit. That was true for the disciples who spread the Word all over the Middle East and more, most of who were killed for their boldness. It was the people who became believers that became the leaders of the churches.

Let me ask you this question: Whose job is it to grow the church? That's just something to think about as we move ahead here. Many people think that the calling of a minister places one person in the leading role to assist a congregation to grow and prosper. As one of those ministers, let me tell you, that's not true. Here are some things to know as we continue this message.

The average time of service in a church for ministers is less than 5 years. On average, that is the length of the ministry of a pastor. For some denominations, the length of service is even lower, at 3 years. If you hear of a minister's length of service being in double digits, that is very unusual. You here at CCI can testify to the reality of this statistic. If everything in developing and growing a church rests with the pastor, that's a big job. So, is it ALL the pastor's job?

Let me share another factor to consider as we try to determine whose job it is to bloom a church. Can you tell me the four main reasons someone visits or joins a church? Let me share the reasons and the percentages of each.

Advertising, signs or such – 2%

Organized visitation programs – 6%

Invited by a friend in the congregation – 86%

Oh, yes, and finally, to follow a pastor – 6%

It's not hard to answer the question when I ask, "Whose job is it anyway?" Our church has had a great deal of transition over the years – several interim pastors, more

than one location, and significant transition of church members. I trust no one thinks this is an exception. It isn't. But it does bring to the center of this message the reality that it is the members of this church and every church to "go ye therefore." Just like Jason at the church in Thessalonica, one person can have a significant role in the wellbeing and growth of the church.

I know I make many references to my early church days, but one of my memories has always stayed with me. Almost in every revival time, one night of the preaching was called "Fill a pew." Each of us was urged to invite a friend or neighbor to the service such that all the pews in the church were full. That was quite an accomplishment for my church which has seating for over 2000. Can you imagine having to set up chairs and put them away for that many people? Luckily, the church has rows of pews already set up.

That's a light example of the message of today's sermon. Yes, the pastor has a significant role in carrying out the work of God's calling. And yes, the leadership here, like our Board of Directors, has a big role to play in maintaining the church. But truth be told, each person in this and every congregation has a significant role in the life of this faith family. The question for today is not only "Whose job is it anyway," but more deeply, "What is my job here in the church?" And "What is your job?" I can't answer that for you, but I encourage you to prayerfully

consider what you believe the Lord has given you to do and what do you want to do?

Believe me, I try to keep that in focus each day I am serving as your pastor. There are tasks I know I am called to do, and I want to be faithful in fulfilling those. One of those is this – to love you. That isn't a task, really. It's a joy and a blessing. It's just that I have other responsibilities as your shepherd, and I want to make sure those are before me as I lead us. Let's keep moving forward doing God's work. There is much to do.