

“WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? (#2): USE WHAT I HAVE”

(John 6:1-14)

© 2007 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-21-07]

--I--

1. Read Text: John 6:1-14 and Pray.
2. Last week we began a new sermon series called “What Is A Christian?,” in which we’re exploring some of the *practices* of Christianity, and how being a Christian is as much defined by what we *DO* as what we *BELIEVE*.

A–We learned that for Jesus, this practice of Christianity is summed up in two goals: (#1) love God; and (#2) love your neighbor,... and that one way we can accomplish the first of these is through *Worship* (understood as simply being ourselves before God).

B–Today, I want us to focus on a second way that we can “love God” – that is: through the offering to God of our resources and our very selves.

3. Now the biblical word for this is “*Stewardship*,” and it causes many of to get nervous, because we immediately associate it with someone hitting us up for money.

A–Well, biblically it actually *does* deal with money (though *not* in the way we usually think), and make no mistake, I *will* be focusing on this in a later sermon.

B–But today I want us to step back and explore how the *use* of our talents, abilities, and resources actually reveals the nature of our relationship with God – that we “love God” (or not) by how we *use* what we have.

–II–

4. I think today’s story from John 6 is an example of this. Here we have Jesus and his disciples, after a long day of ministry, going up to the top of a hill to rest a bit.

A–But the crowds find out and follow them there, seeking some great miracle in their lives. And realizing that they’re hungry, Jesus asks his disciples about providing a meal for them.

B–And the responses that Jesus receives in this story I believe symbolize three responses you and I *can* (and very often *do*) give to Christ when he calls us to do something:

5. First of all, **some of us are like Philip** who, being in charge of provisions, probably felt more than a bit overwhelmed with having to provide a meal for 5000 people.

A– And so in Verse 7 he says, “*Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little*” – in other words, “***Jesus, we can't do that! We don't have the resources!***”

B–Does that sound familiar? In your home? At work? Here at church?

1–I.E., Jesus calls us to step out on faith and do something or risk something for him, and like Philip, we look around at the outward situation and circumstances, at what we *think* we have available as resources, and through worldly eyes, we logically conclude that “*It can’t be done!*”

3–Now, this is a perspective that always sees the glass “half-empty,” & it tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy – we don’t *think* we can accomplish things, so we *don’t!*

6. Then, there’s also **the response of Andrew** (Peter’s brother), who did *more* than just complain about why they *couldn’t* feed the crowd. He evidently went *looking* for a solution to the problem, because he at least found this young boy who had five barley loaves and two fish.

A–But Verse 9 tells us that even with this, he said, “...*But what are they among so many people?*” – in other words, “*Jesus, it’s just not enough! **We tried, but we can’t!***”

B–Oh, if I had a nickel for every time I heard that, I’d be a rich pastor!

1–This is a perspective that tends to give up too soon! We hit a rough patch in the road, or things don’t go as smoothly or as easily as we thought they would, and immediately want to jump ship and give up!

2–And I’ll confess: ...there have been times in my life/ministry when God called me to do things and serve Him in ways that seemed at first challenging (but exciting),...

3–...and yet when I stepped out to be obedient to that call, it seemed that I hit roadblock after roadblock, and after a while I just wanted to quit and say “*Forget this, God! It’s just too hard! I tried, but it just can’t be done!*” – some of you have felt that way at times, too.

7. But I’m thankful that in the times I was feeling that way, that response wasn’t my final one. Instead, I’ve discovered that there’s a third response that’s possible.. **the response of the little boy**, who is neither named nor are his words recorded.

A–What IS recorded are his *actions*: ...somewhere between Verse 9 (where Andrew discovers this boy’s food), and Verse 11 (where Jesus blesses it), this young boy *offered the resources he had* in service to Christ.

B–Again, we don’t know what he said, but I can imagine he may have said something like, “***I don’t have much, but here... USE WHAT I HAVE.***”¹

1–Corrie ten Boom once put it this way, “*It is not my ability, but my response to God’s ability, that counts.*”²

2–And perhaps you’ve heard these before: “*God is not as interested in our ability as in our availability” – “*He’s not interested in how many talents we have, but in how we are using the talent we have.*”³*

–III–

8. So let me ask: how are YOU using and investing the talents and resources that God has blessed you with?

A–For example, how are you investing your time, talents, and abilities by volunteering to serve God and your fellow humanity through some ministry of your church?

B–And yes – how are you investing even your *money* generously in the work of God’s kingdom through this, your church?

C–Remember that Jesus says in Matthew 6:21, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart is also*”⁴ – in other words, how you and I use the “treasure” of our time, talents, and even our money is an indicator of what we value and love with our “heart.”

D–So if we want to “love God” more, one way is for us to be willing to be more like this little boy and say of our personal resources, “*Lord, I may not have much; but here... take and use what I have!*”

9. Now, if you’re not yet a Christian, then you’re exempt from what I’m about to say.

A–But if you *are* a follower of Jesus, then I want to end with a challenge to remember that the first way we practice our faith is by “loving God”; and that one way we can “love God” is by how we USE what we have – *that’s* the biblical meaning of “stewardship.”

B–So as I mentioned earlier, while we’ll be focusing more specifically on the connection between *money* and stewardship in a later message, today we’re going to end with a focus on the offering of ourselves in service to God – of our time, talents, and abilities.

C–And as a tool for us to do this, when you came in you were given a “Ministry Volunteer Commitment” sheet – please take it out:

1–On it are listed ministry areas that can provide outlets and opportunities for us to practice our love for God by volunteering to serve Him through a ministry(ies) of our church.

2–After I offer a prayer, I want to invite you to complete it as you feel led, and then bring the sheet forward to the altar as a way of expressing your love for God through the offering of the “resource” of your very self.⁵

10. Rather than giving excuses,⁶ God is inviting us to “Use What We Have” in service for him. He is calling. What will be your response?

11. [PRAYER]
12. [As soft background music plays, all are invited to complete their MVC sheets and bring them forward to the altar...]

ENDNOTES:

1. One important side note here that does not directly deal with my main point: Please note that after blessing the food, Jesus fed *everyone* present at this event – even the doubter Philip, the “too quick to give up” Andrew, the curious onlookers, the “wait and see-ers,” his enemies, etc. In other words, Jesus doesn’t “leave us out of the party” just because we have doubts or are not 100% obedient to his call all the time. However, I believe such obedience will help *us* understand and appropriate the blessings of his call more quickly than if not.

This idea is captured in the story of a great gathering of Christian youth where the offering was being counted. At the bottom of the offering, the counters found a picture of a teenage girl. They all made the same immediate assumption. Some boy had taken a girl's wallet, taken out the picture and thrown it in the offering basket as a practical joke. But then someone turned the picture over. There, written on the back, were these words: “I have nothing to give, but I give myself.” [Robert C. Shannon, 1000 Windows, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1997)].

2. Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #9.

3. Both quotes cited in Croft M. Pentz, The Complete Book of Zingers (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1990). Here are several additional quotes (the first four from same source) that describe this attitude:

“Ten ways to get rid of the blues: Go out & do something for someone else--then repeat nine times.”

“A believer's talents are not to be laid up for self--they are to be laid out for service.”

“A Christian can do great things for God by doing small things for others.”

“Your life is God's gift to you; what you do with it is your gift to God.”

“Lord, give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people”

[Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry# 8575]. Another author challenges us this way:

“Remember your possibilities; forget your limitations.

Remember your potentialities; forget your seeming restrictions.

Remember your abilities; forget your disabilities.

Remember your assets; forget your liabilities.

Remember your strengths; forget your weaknesses.

Remember your joys; forget your sorrows.”

[William Arthur Ward (1812-1882), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry# 9271].

4. Also Luke 12:34.

5. The Bible speaks of the giving back to God of the “tithe” (tenth) as a way of helping us keep our focus on God even in our financial life. But what if we applied this same principle of the tithe to the offering of our time, talents, and abilities? What would happen if every church member “tithed” their *time* to the church by volunteering in some way? If there are 112 waking hours available each week, then that would mean we would volunteer at least 11 hours to the work of God through our church! If every member did this, there would never be a “volunteer shortage” in any church!

6. Listen to how one author explains how the world is a better place because the following persons didn't give excuses as to why they couldn't do what God called them to do...

"The world's a better place because Michelangelo did not say, "I don't do ceilings."

The world's a better place because a German monk named Martin Luther did not say, "I don't do doors."

The world's a better place because an Oxford don named John Wesley didn't say, "I don't do field preaching."

The world's a better place because Moses didn't say, "I don't do Pharaohs or mass migrations."

The world's a better place because Noah didn't say, "I don't do arks and animals."

The world's a better place because Rahab didn't say, "I don't do enemy spies."

The world's a better place because Ruth didn't say, "I don't do mothers-in-law."

The world's a better place because Samuel didn't say, "I don't do mornings."

The world's a better place because David didn't say, "I don't do giants."

The world's a better place because Peter didn't say, "I don't do Gentiles."

The world's a better place because John didn't say, "I don't do deserts."

The world's a better place because Mary didn't say, "I don't do virgin births."

The world's a better place because Paul didn't say, "I don't do correspondence."

The world's a better place because Mary Magdalene didn't say, "I don't do feet."

The world's a better place because Jesus didn't say, "I don't do crosses."

And the world will be a better place only if you and I don't say, "I don't do ..."

[Leonard Sweet, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. Cited in Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 2].