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Pastor:  
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### Sunday, January 17, 2010

Sermon Texts: Nehemiah 8: 1-10  
Luke 4: 14-21  
Galatians 3: 25-29

Sermon Title: "We Are Called to Serve"

Sermon Topic: Serving Christ

Sermon Purpose: To teach that there is no distinction between men and women in service, and that all Christians have a right *and duty* to serve, when asked.

.....  
*Sermon Prayer: Almighty God, Who has sounded in our ears the saving truth: Enlighten our minds to the full understanding of what we have heard spoken, and deepen our serious impression, that we may not only be hearers of good words, but also doers of good deeds; striving ever to live blameless and fruitful and faithful lives to the glory of Your name. Amen.*

What do we notice about those who are called to serve; those called upon to read from God's word: I mean, aside from the fact that one was a scribe named Ezra, and the other one was Jesus of Nazareth?

First of all, each of them was one of **many** capable of reading the law. You see, according to temple law of the day, the invitation to read and to preach from the text **could** be extended by the ruling elders to **any** competent member of the congregation - or even to a visitor. And because Ezra and Jesus were members of the congregation before which each spoke, each was eligible to be called upon for such a task. (I can think of certain members of **this** congregation - even certain **officers** - going into **apoplexy** if they were to be called to the lectern to read or to the pulpit to preach. Take note, my friends: when you give your life to Jesus, there are **obligations**, as well as **privileges**!)

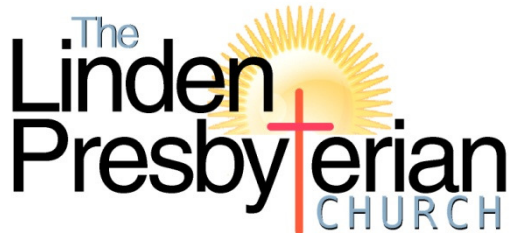
The men with Ezra were neither priests nor Levites, but laymen: common members of the congregation also capable of reading the law with the proper feeling in order to make the word of God speak to the people.

Both Jesus and Ezra spoke in front of the **whole** congregation. It was common practice, in the time that Ezra spoke, that the **women were excluded** from the religious meetings, when the law was to be read. (According to **those** standards, and if we take a look around the sanctuary, this morning, the law could be read in my **office**.) Our lesson from Nehemiah depicts an **unusual** situation.

In Jesus' day, the women were permitted to **hear** the word, even though they were not permitted to **read** it.

And later, when Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, even **this** prohibition was abandoned because faith in Christ has made us one. No longer were distinctions to be made between male and female. There was to be no segregation between free and slave, Jew and Gentile converts to Christianity. And, **that separation must not exist** in the family of Christ's church, now.





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All of us have been called by Jesus Christ to serve. If we **read** the Scripture, but don't **abide** by it, then we don't give proper service to God, to Jesus, or to our faith community. If we abide by **part** of the gospel, but not the rest of it, we bastardize **the whole** gospel. If we believe in the freedom received through faith in Jesus Christ, but deny other believers the opportunity to serve merely because of race, gender, economic or marital status, education, or for any other reason; then we **deny** that freedom and we deny **Christ**. According to the Shorter Catechism that many of us learned back in Confirmation Class, we make a "scandal of Christ and of His gospel."

A ten-year-old schoolboy was asked by his father, "What do you have in mind with regard to your violin lessons?"

The boy replied, "Well, for **one** thing, I want to get into God's orchestra."

The father responded, "So, you think that if you become good enough, when you die, you'll go to Heaven and sit close to God's throne and play your violin?"

"No," the boy replied with a serious tone in his voice. "I didn't mean that at all. God has an orchestra, here on earth, and I want to get into it."

The father persisted, "Do you mean, then, that any person who knows how to make good music gets into God's orchestra?"

"Oh, no!" The boy quickly replied, "Only those who do it with the thought of making people happy and cheerful, those who do it to serve; not those who do it just to make money."

God **does** have His orchestra here on earth, and each of us has his/her assigned place to fill. Many of us won't be called upon to play first violin, but we still have some prominent place to fill, nonetheless. Each of us has our **own** part to play. It may be a very **small** part, today; but it's **our** part and it **should** be played in a great way.

Thomas Bridges described a certain performer as "not a great actor, but an actor who played small parts in a great way." Our second violin in God's plan has a place equally important to the first violin. The same is true of the oboe, kazoo, trumpet, bass drum, saxophone, bagpipe, clarinet, timpani, snare, flute, cello, viola, or any other musical instrument in our world.

It will be a serious situation; indeed, if we should ever think what we're asked to do is so small that it's unimportant. It's not the **size** of the job that gives it its deepest meaning, but it's the part it holds in the **whole project!** It's the **way** we **do** our job! Be a good second violin, if that's what God has called you to be.

Now, I want you to think **seriously** about something. Next week, we're having a Congregational Meeting. There are still a few positions that need to be filled. There are concerns that will be addressed. And, there just **may** be some actions taken that might not sit well with some of you.

Now, I know people have things to do and places to go. I can't help it that the congregation's by-laws stipulate that this particular meeting **must** be held on the fourth Sunday on January. When the vote was taken to **accept** the last revision of the by-laws that's what those members who attended that meeting voted.





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It may be “inconvenient” for you to have to attend that meeting. It’s going to be inconvenient for my family, too, for **other** reasons. **But, just remember this:** It was “inconvenient” for **Jesus** to stop along the highway to heal the lepers. It was inconvenient for our Lord to interrupt his discussion with the disciples to take time to heal that cripple that was lowered through the roof, by his four friends, at the house in Capernaum. It was inconvenient for Christ to be **crucified**, too! But, do you know what? He did all that - and **more** - because it was His **job**; it was **His** part to play in God’s plan for our salvation.

It’s **your** job to attend that meeting of the Congregation and Corporation. It’s **your** job to participate in that discussion and decision-making. It’s **your** job to fill offices and to bring people into the fellowship of this church. Your absence from that meeting is **not** doing your job; it’s **not doing your part** in God’s plan for the ministry of this congregation.

I’ve heard people say, “Well, I’m too old to do (this or that). It’s time for some of the **younger** ones to step up and take over. I’ve done my share and it’s time for me to sit back and retire.” Well, we **do** need young people to take on some responsibilities and be among tomorrow’s leaders. But, let me tell you something: Nowhere does the Bible say that we retire from our responsibilities at 45, or 65, or whenever. God’s Retirement Plan is a whole lot different than man’s: If you’re still **breathing** in this life, you’re **not retired** from your Christian commitment. God’s Retirement Plan “kicks in” when you **leave** this earth, and not before. Until that time, this church - and the whole Church of Jesus Christ - needs the **energy** and the **dreams** of our **youth** to be balanced by the **experience** and the **substance** of our older members. **Together** they provide for the **total** ministry of the faith ... and for our mission that was assigned to us by Jesus Christ. And, my friends, that took place when we proclaimed our faith in Him and became members of the Christian Church!

Okay, I know it may seem as though I’m “preaching to the choir” because it’s those who are involved who are sitting in the pews, each Sunday. Well, that may be true. But, if each of us did our **job properly**, there’d be a lot more voices in that choir!

So, do your job. Get the word out for next week. Then, we’ll see what we’re going to be doing in the weeks, months, and years that follow.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, by Your Spirit bless all who share the work and witness of this congregation. Empower them to carry the message and to share the faith. Give us yet another taste of your goodness. Inspire us, again, with your love. Guide us by Your Spirit. Protect us by your power, and receive us in your mercy, now and always. Amen.

