

How To Get The Job Done

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

(Adapted from a sermon by Maurice A. Fetty.)

It's a startling fact but true -- Jesus and politicians have a lot in common. This no doubt comes as a surprise to those who regard politics as a dirty business, or who think of politicians essentially as liars, and who believe steadfastly that politics and religion don't mix. Nonetheless, Jesus and the politicians have a lot in common.

When you think of it, politicians get elected by promising us something better. A few years ago President Reagan was elected and then re-elected by asking the public, "Are you better off now than four years ago?" The first time, the people answered, "no," and elected Reagan for the promise of something better. Four years later they responded "yes" to the question and elected Reagan for another term in hope for an even better four years.

Jesus and politicians do have a lot in common. Not always, however. A little girl asked her mother whether all fairy tales began with, "Once upon a time." "No," replied the mother. "Today most of them begin with 'If I'm elected.' "Jesus made promises, but not like that.

Was Jesus, 2,000 years ago, promising something better? Indeed he was. He said he had come to bring in the kingdom of God, the rules of God's righteousness in the world. For 900 years, Jews had been hoping for a restoration of the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon. For 500 years they had been longing for an end to foreign tyranny and a return to prosperity and freedom. And in Jesus' time the longings and expectations were at an all-time high.

For Jews of that time, the hopes of a better life were often focused on a Messiah, a new King David who would come and restore their good fortune. Others spoke of a messianic age about to arrive, the coming of the kingdom of God, a time when God would reign supreme over his people, and freedom and prosperity and the good life would be enjoyed. It would

also be a time when righteousness and justice and peace would prevail.

Had there been people who claimed to be the promised Messiah? Indeed there had been, and the Romans, then occupying Judea and Palestine, promptly disposed of them. But now Jesus appears on the scene, announcing far and wide that the kingdom of God is at hand, and that he is God's agent to bring in his kingdom, the new and better life.

Not only is Jesus like politicians in promising a new and better way, he is like them in his struggle to get the word out to all the people, to announce the kingdom is coming, to raise expectations and to prepare them to receive Jesus' message. Without newspapers, radios, television and the internet, how do you get the job done? You do it in person and you delegate emissaries, advance men, to prepare the way and to excite anticipation for Jesus' arrival and for his message of hope.

Politicians could learn from Jesus, and so could businesses and churches. For would we not all agree, he got the job done! After all, one-quarter of today's world population, a billion plus people, claim to be Jesus' people. And that doesn't even count the millions who have preceded us in the previous 20 centuries.

How do we get the job done in our time? Our text gives us clues. Here they are. The first thing we learn from Jesus is...

In order to get the job done we must delegate

Delegation is more difficult than it sounds. Delegation is especially difficult for talented and extraordinary leaders, and even more difficult for leaders who seem to have a special calling from God.

That was the case with Moses some 13 centuries before Christ. After successfully leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt toward freedom in the Promised Land, Moses had problems with a somewhat rebellious and cantankerous group.

So he complained to God, "I am not able to carry all these people alone, the burden is too heavy for me" (Numbers 11:14). In fact, Moses was so discouraged he asked God to kill him unless he helped him.

So God asked Moses to gather 70 men whom he knew to be natural leaders and officers and to bring them to the tent of meeting, where God manifested his presence. God said, "I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone" (Numbers 11:17). So God's spirit did come upon the 70 and Moses had people to whom he could delegate responsibility and leadership.

Thirteen centuries later, Jesus uses the same number -- 70 -- to recruit men to help him spread the word about the new kingdom of God. If Moses and the 70 elders were developing the Old Israel, Jesus and the 70 were about to develop the New Israel.

But in Jesus' case, the 70 signify something more. If the 12 apostles were originally sent to the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel, the 70 have a broader mission. They are to announce the coming kingdom not only to Jews, but to Samaritans and Gentiles as well, because in his day, it was popularly believed there were 70 nations in the world. Thus, Jesus' 70 disciples symbolized his universal mission to all the nations -- Gentiles and Samaritans included. All the outsiders were now invited to be insiders.

Delegation is difficult for gifted, energetic people like Moses and Jesus because they fear no one can do the job quite as well as they. And they probably are right. Yet, without delegation even the most talented and energetic leaders either burn out or wear out or both.

Besides, delegation by gifted, talented, energetic people to other gifted, talented, spirited people has a multiplying effect. Many people are just waiting to be recognized and to be given a chance to use their abilities for

a greater cause. Thus, the leader who delegates wisely can multiply his effect exponentially -- much like planting an apple seed to yield an apple tree with apples and seeds uncountable.

When Tom Peters wrote his book, *Thriving On Chaos*, he had something like this in mind -- that is, allowing for freedom and creativity by loosening control and delegating. It is precisely what a lot of corporations are doing -- decentralizing, delegating and allowing more opportunity for creative synergy.

And it is what has to happen in church boards and committees -- delegation. When spirit-filled people like Moses' 70 elders are given challenges and responsibilities, marvellous results can take place for the kingdom of God.

Want to get the job done? Follow Jesus' example -- delegate.

A second way to get the job done is to discover new opportunities.

One of the common mistakes of people, businesses and politicians who fail is in their inability or unwillingness to discover new opportunities. Nearly every marketing success story in the last two centuries has had to do with building the proverbial "better mousetrap" and telling people about it.

Think of it, for centuries people thought travel by horseback and horse drawn carriage was the way to go until the petrol engine car came along, welcomed at first by derision and scepticism. And if for some the car was not fast enough, for others the aeroplane was a defiance of God's laws. "If God had intended man to fly, he would have given him wings." Some can still remember people who made that statement.

Failure is often associated with the assumption that as things have been, they always shall be. Failure often is the inability to accept the new realities.

Families sometimes fail for those reasons. Think how often we pass on bad habits from one generation to the next because we somehow think they are normal. Tragically, children who were physically or sexually abused turn around and physically or sexually abuse their own children. And even perhaps more subtly and tragically, we pass our spiritual and psychological abuse from generation to generation. In other words, rather than discovering new opportunities for new familial patterns and realities, we repeat the old.

Churches do the same thing. If churches succeeded 20 years ago with a certain style and manner and approach, they often wrongly assume they can continue that pattern for ever. As a consequence, many mainline churches are aging and dying and also as a consequence the Roman Catholic Church is experiencing a drastic shortage of priests and nuns.

Jesus faced a similar problem. Many of his contemporaries assumed the kingdom of God consisted in the restoration of a small, but prosperous and powerful Davidic Kingdom. They presumed the promulgation of a Jewish exclusivism started by Ezra and Nehemiah to address a need of the past. They were defining the future by the past.

But Jesus, as always, was the revolutionary. He appointed 70 disciples to go to all people -- Samaritans and Gentiles included. His kingdom -- God's kingdom -- was to be inclusive, not exclusive; universal, not provincial. "The fields are white unto the harvest," he said to the 70.

And if they asked where, he replied to look beyond their own fields, beyond their own backyard, beyond their own past definitions of reality. And that is what he says to the church of today. The fields are white unto harvest. The people are there. And I'm delegating you to discover the new opportunities that are there, to bring them into the kingdom.

Want to get the job done? Then, thirdly, dedicate yourself to the task.

You will note that after Jesus pointed out that the fields were white unto

the harvest he said to his disciples that they should pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers. The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Pray, therefore, for dedicated labourers.

Some years ago Russell Conwell wrote a best-selling book titled, *Acres of Diamonds*. He pointed out that the world is full of diamond-like opportunities for those with eyes to see. But one reason people are not dedicated to mining the acres of diamonds is because they cannot see the opportunities. Remember the stories of people in America who were irked at the oil oozing into their fresh water for their cattle -- irked that is, until someone discovered what could be done with that oil. Then they were dedicated to harvesting enormous fortunes.

The world, we are told, is full of willing people -- some people willing to work, and the rest willing to let them. But the workers are on the side of Jesus and God. "I work," said Jesus, "and my Father in heaven works." If God shuns idleness and laziness, how can we, his people, not be dedicated to his work?

Jesus promised that we would do even greater works than he was doing, if we act in spirit-filled dedication. And just as God gave some of the Divine Spirit to Moses' 70 elders, so has Jesus breathed on his followers the Divine Spirit to be empowered for Divine work.

Most any successful person will tell you that persistence in a task is a major factor in success. Many tell us that success is ten per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration. It is to be remembered that God is not only the Divine, Creative Mind of the universe. He is also the Divine, Creative Energy of the universe. God not only thinks. He acts. He gets things done.

Jesus asked his disciples to pray for labourers to help reap the fields white unto harvest. And we may well imagine that when these dedicated, praying people finished their prayers, it dawned on them that they should volunteer to be one of the labourers, one of those delegated to discover new opportunities for the success God is wishing to give them. Because

God, of all people, wants his kingdom to grow, to succeed, to become more and more universal and inclusive.

However, there is a word of warning to dedicated people, because dedicated people can sometimes be foolish and wasteful in their determination. You will notice that Jesus told the 70 that if people don't receive them and their message, shake the dust off their feet as judgment against them, and move on to the next new opportunity.

As the old saying has it: "If the horse is dead, get off." If people don't respond to the gospel, move on to those who do. If people after repeated invitations refuse to return to church, move on to those open and receptive to the gospel. "If the horse is dead, get off."

If they won't receive you, shake the dust off your feet and move on. If the territory is overworked, if that market is saturated, for heaven's sake, move on.

Want to get the job done? Most of us do. And Jesus, our Lord and Master teacher, shows us how -- delegate, discover, and dedicate yourself to the enormous tasks at hand. Jesus and politicians do have a lot in common, except that Jesus delivered on his promises. He promised, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." And the promise came true -- a church a billion strong and growing -- growing throughout the world.

The fields are indeed white unto the harvest. Pray that the Lord will send us many dedicated labourers to go out and to bring in the harvest.

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