

"Doing Great Things for God."

2 Sam. 7:1-14; Ps. 89:20-37; Mark 6

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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We were away in North Dakota for two weeks. It was good to get away and it is good to be back!

Along with visiting family and enjoying the 4th of July in a small town on the Great Plains, we had a project. We were to paint my father-in-law's barn.

This barn had been in sad shape for some time the wood required much scraping and prep work. 20 gallons of oil prime and 15 gallons of finish paint later, we could step back, admire our work and know that we had done something great for Nancy's Dad.

My guess is that all of us, at one time or another, have had projects or tasks, work that we have done as volunteers or for pay, that has had a beginning, middle, and an end. When we are done we can step back and say: "I did that!" We can feel proud and have that sense of accomplishment that is like food for the soul.

Those who have gone on mission trips know the feeling. We have some friends with us today from New York State, on their way to Clare for a week of mission work, who will experience that feeling and also know that they have made a powerful and positive and lasting impact in the lives of others. Hopefully the affect of their efforts will have a lasting impact on their lives also.

We all want to be "doers". The Bible in the book of James exhorts us to be "doers of the Word, and not hearers only". In Matthew 25

Jesus paints a picture of the last judgment with the sheep and goats being separated, not on the basis of what they believed but on the basis of how they acted, what they did for the "least of these."

Here in the Old Testament story King David, this great "doer", model king, one whose heart was the Lord's, wanted to do something great for God. He wanted to build a temple dedicated to God and a fitting place in which the Ark of the Covenant could be housed, better than the temporary shelter of a tent.

David even consulted the prophet Nathan who gave him the "green light", telling him to go for it and that God was with him. It's interesting that on several other occasions, especially when David wanted to know whether he should engage in battle, he would inquire of the Lord and wait for the response. This time however, David already has a plan and he simply wants God's representative, Nathan, to "rubber stamp" it, which he does.

There are times when peoples' minds are made up and they come to their pastor not for advice or an opinion, but to have their plans blessed - one might even say "baptized."

But, as my father (a pastor) would often caution me: "Baptized ignorance is still ignorance." Just because we have sought out the religious leader and gotten their blessing doesn't mean that our project or our activity is God-directed.

And even when the pastor or the session or someone else in authority says "No" to our plans, what is to keep us from going ahead and doing as we see fit, with an almost "I'll show them!" attitude? Our pride can complicate things in a hurry and leave us unable to hear the wisdom of those around us.

In the case of King David, he was wise enough to hear what Nathan had to say the morning after God spoke to his prophet about this building project. Regardless of where David's heart was in his desire to do something Great for God, regardless of his motives, his hands were perhaps a bit too bloody from empire-building to be engaged in the holy work of Temple building.

Instead, God had other things in mind for him. God would build David a "house". He would establish his lineage. God would be with him and his descendants. God, who had already done great things for David, would continue to do so, for his own name's sake.

David, for his part, listened and learned and let go of his need to embark on a project for God that was not God directed.

There is much for us to learn from this story of ancient times. The need to listen to God is no less urgent now than it was then. The need for humility and a willingness to change course when change is warranted is also a constant companion of those who wish to follow where God is leading.

And we all know how important it is to follow the leading of the Lord. These days there are far too many who think doing a great deed for God means blowing something up or blowing someone away. There are far too many who are so absolutely convinced they are doing the Lord's work that there is simply no talking to them.

As Christians we look to Jesus to be our guide in our dealings with others. In this passage from Mark's Gospel we are told that the disciples and Jesus had been busy, busy, busy. They didn't even have time to take a break to catch a quick bite of food.

They've left one place intending to find a deserted spot to rest but the crowds figured out where they were going and got there first. Jesus' reaction to the crowd was not one of impatience or frustration or resentment. Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion on the crowd because "They were like sheep without a shepherd."

There are many times when we are tempted to give in to feelings of resentment or frustration or even anger, when the needs of others intrude on what we want to do and when we don't always consider that what we are doing for them, in Jesus' name, is a great work.

We could do far worse than to model Jesus' attitude of compassion and let that be our guide as we seek to follow him in today's world.

God, in Christ, has already done the greatest work of all in securing our salvation and calling us beloved members of his family. The work we do is always a response to God's great work done for us.

As we continue to balance our efforts to listen and learn, let us be led by the Master and strive to do a masterful job as his disciples, leaving time in the schedule for studying God's word, communing with God in prayer and in worship, and, yes, striving to respond to God's great Gift of life in Christ with lives of dedicated service and thankful hearts.

May it be so for us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.