HELP WANTED: Inquire Inside

Exodus 18:13-27

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

June 22, 2014

AUDIO: www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/183534

I want to begin by sharing with you a make-believe story I used at our recent Equipping Workshop, so some of you have heard this. Imagine with me that somehow, we discovered that $300,000 was buried under the floor of FBC JC. It is lying there, unused, untapped, at our disposal if we would only discover and claim it. But in order to get to it, we would have to move some things, knock down a wall and there would be sawdust and noise. In other words, some mess! Well, it isn't money, but buried here at FBC JC is a great deal of untapped giftedness and the energy of hundreds of volunteers, waiting to be brought to the table and engaged in meaningful ministry. But to do this, we will have to rethink some things, rearrange some priorities. There will be some sawdust, noise and messiness. It is my vision that this church become an equipping congregation, learning what Moses learned in our scripture for this morning,

Moses was a great crisis leader (leading a revolution) but he had some things to learn about sustaining an organization. He was not so good at delegating. He tried to do it all by himself. I've made that mistake. And some of us who lead committees, ministry teams and community ministries have done it, too. In fact, I would confess that in my own life, my over-activity which does not involve and delegate others is a form of laziness. That's right. Because it is always easier to do ourselves than to train and engage others! So Moses had a lot to learn.

Why was Moses wearing himself out? Note the question from his father-in-law (v. 14). A good question for us. Perhaps Moses was doing things this way because this is what he learned from his culture (we know that he was doing things like Bedouin chieftain of the time did it). Perhaps he did it because that's the way it's always been done before! Maybe he did it because he was addicted to being needed. After all, the Exodus had positioned him as a beloved leader.

Now I could stop here and say, "The moral of this story is: Listen to your father-in-law!" But there is really more! Notice the very practical lessons which Moses' father-in-law teaches him--lessons which apply thousands of years later: 1) You are exhausting yourself and others (think about the long lines when Moses tried to hear all the cases), v. 18; 2) You cannot do God's work alone, v. 18; 3) Use your teaching time to train and equip others, v. 20; 4) Appoint people of good reputation--character comes first; they can learn the job skills, v. 21.

I want to spend a few minutes talking with you about our upcoming deacon nomination process. In the same way that Exodus 18 zeroes in on godliness of life vs. a job description, so the New Testament list of qualifications for deacon does the same thing. Look at 1 Timothy 3:8-13: "...deacons must be respectable, not double-tongued, moderate in the amount of wine they

drink and with no squalid greed for money. They must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. They are first to be examined, and admitted to serve as deacons only if there is nothing against them. Similarly, women must be respectable, not gossips but sober and wholly reliable. Deacons must be husbands of one wife and must be people who manage their children and households well. Those of them who carry out their duties well as deacons will earn a high standing for themselves and an authoritative voice in matters concerning faith in Christ Jesus." (New Jerusalem Bible).

Perhaps the reason not much is mentioned in scripture about what deacons do is that is constantly changing. After all, the word deacon means servant. "What errands do you need us to run?" should be the question on the lips of deacons. In our own congregation, our deacons adopted a mission statement of advice and support to the pastoral staff, offering wise counsel and encouragement in matters of our church's mission and fellowship. Added to this are the ministry and worship errands: taking the offering and assisting with communion.

Do you see what happens in the Moses story of Exodus 18? The small tasks become infused with value and importance. Where Christ's love is, the little becomes much. Whether God is calling you to deacon ministry or some other place of service, remember two things. The church is to cultivate a culture of calling. And each of us is called to step up and serve. In an equipping church, leaders will stop asking members, "What can we do for you?" and begin asking, "What can we do together?" and "Who else might we involve and equip for this ministry?"

I recently ran into an acquaintance, a young lady who has just graduated from high school here in Jefferson City. She told me about her college plans. She is so excited. And then she told me this. While in high school, she did some shadowing of school teachers at South School (our community partner). She said she shadowed two teachers who are followers of Christ, two of our very own FBC members. And this young lady said after that, I came home and told my parents, "I know what God wants me to do with my life!" She's found her calling. She's discovered her gifts and passion. And as she told me this, her face was aglow! She had found her reason to be! Her calling! Her mission!

We've all seen those signs in store windows. "Help wanted. Inquire inside." Inquire within your community. Within our church. Look inside yourself. What is God calling you to do and be?