

3rd Sunday after Epiphany Jan. 28, 2018 Pastor Hanneman

What is your job description? If you had to explain to someone who had no idea what you did for a living, how would you go about explaining it? Trying to explain what we do may not be that easy because many times we tend to do more than what our title might imply.

What is the job description of a Christian? That too can be rather difficult, but we could sum it up like this: A Christian is someone who believes and follows Jesus Christ as God. But what does that truly mean? Well, it means that we dedicate our lives to our God by doing what he says and trusting in him above everything else.

One of the commands our God gives us, is the command to go and make disciples. This really is the goal of any Christian. But, as we live in our professions we might find that we don't always have the energy to do the work required to reach out to the lost. We were given an example of a man, Elisha, leaving his livelihood to take on this calling full-time. But, not everyone can do that. There are many people who can't be the pastor and must remain at their jobs doing what they do very well.

But, does that mean that those who have other full-time jobs shouldn't be expected to fulfill God's command to make disciples? The answer of course is, "No." We really can't forget that we all have a job to do as Christians along with our current means of earning income and our God really doesn't allow us to excuse ourselves from this work. That is why we must learn to embrace the calling your God has given you.

The prophets Elijah and Elisha are examples of men who were called into the full-time ministry and chose to leave everything behind. The lesson shows us the calling of Elisha in particular. ¹⁹ *So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.*

God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah's work was ending but before he could be done he needed to train the next leader. Notice what we learn about Elisha when we meet him. He is a farmer or rancher with plenty of oxen to help plough the fields. Elisha was a rich man who earned his income. Elijah was calling him to leave everything to serve the Lord full-time. Could you have left? When I was at the seminary training to be a minister we often reminded each other that we are not in this for the money. Elisha is a prime example of this truth. He was going to be taking a serious pay-cut to be God's spokesman in Israel.

Elisha didn't hesitate: ²⁰ *Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"* ²¹ *So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.*

All he wanted to do was say good bye and Elijah granted him that request. What I find interesting is Elijah's response to Elisha's request: *"What have I done to you?"* Elijah was reminding Elisha that he didn't have to be God's next prophet. He didn't have to do this full-time. Now God wouldn't have chosen Elisha if he wasn't going to happily jump at the opportunity to being God's prophet to Israel, but it was still Elisha's choice non-the-less. What do we see Elisha do? He embraced his calling and went to work.

Now, as Christians we are not given the choice of whether we are or aren't going to call others to faith. We can choose to do this full-time or not, but we can't say no to our God's calling. But, have you ever felt that since you are not a full-time pastor and since you have a full-time pastor that maybe you don't have to do the work anymore?

Have you ever looked at your workload as a rancher, employee at work, or employer, and felt there is no way I can get my work done let alone God's work? Even in retirement you might wonder where has our time gone to be able to even try to reach out to anyone. Good thing you have a pastor who will do this for you, right? I mean that is what we pay him for, right?

Sort of. Our God has given each of you your special gifts and abilities which allows you to do the work that you do and provide for those you love and care for. But God didn't just make you to be who you are, so you can do the job you have. No, he gave you the gifts you have so that while you are doing your job you will be in contact with people like you who will be more receptive to hearing God's Word from you and not your pastor.

Often people see pastors like salesmen. They have something to sell that might be good for me or not, but I can't always take the salesman's word for it because he is supposed to believe what he's saying. But, when someone who is like them, who thinks like them, says, hey I want to tell you about Jesus, it will be recognized more for being genuine because you aren't paid to spread the word.

You also know your people better because you are around them more. You know their history and if they have had a problem with religion. You know if they were rubbed wrong by a certain church or even your church. Knowing that you can approach that person better by knowing how to get through to them and cut through all their hurt feelings than someone starting from scratch.

Your God has given you a job: make disciples and he places you in the perfect position to do your job and he has given you the words to spread by giving you the Bible. Embrace your calling and the Lord will bless your work.

The reason we all struggle to embrace our calling is because we are afraid of losing something. Elisha lost his wealth. What could you lose if you try and reach out to those closest to you? Could you lose your friends? Could you lose your family? Could you lose your work opportunities? Could you lose your good name? Could you even lose your job? The answer is, "Yes!" We could lose everything for doing this job of making disciples. Elijah's life was threatened constantly and so was Elisha's. They lost their good names and their friends. They often lived alone and often felt like their work was in vain.

So, then why should we embrace this calling knowing that it could cost us our livelihoods? Because it is the unloving thing to embrace the world and let go of our calling. It shows a lack of love for our friends, relatives, and ourselves. What good is it if we get along with our friends but let our friends go to hell because we are afraid how they might react to us sharing our faith? What good is it to live a comfortable life by earning our keep but know that those we work with will go to hell because we are afraid of trying make a living without their help, so we don't tell them what we believe? What good is it to have our family together but let them go to hell because we were afraid that they would stop talking to us for sharing God's Word?

It isn't loving at all to protect our self-interest by not taking care of someone else's spiritual interest. It also shows that we really don't love ourselves so much for in our pursuit of gaining the world we are forfeiting our souls by refusing to do what our God has called us to do. This is your job! We must continue to do the work required of us for the sake of those we love the most, which includes our own souls too.

How do we complete our jobs? Your God has your back! First, he has given you his Word to proclaim to those around you. In fact, he has promised to help you speak so that his message is heard. He will also keep your faith strong because to share God's Word will keep you in his Word so your faith will not falter as you go. Second, he has given you those who have the gifts and abilities to help in this area: full-time ministers of the gospel. You have someone who can help you apply God's Word to help the people you are reaching out to best.

This world is not our final home. We are reminded of that every time we go to a funeral. At the funeral we are reminded that all people are going to meet God face to face. Think of those you love the most. Have you done your job in making sure they know their Savior? Have you told them and are still telling them? If you are then you are doing your job. Remember, the results are in the hands of God. Only he can turn their hearts from rejection to belief. But, they can't hear it unless you tell them.

Embrace your job just like Elisha and go and make disciples of all nations everyday so that when you close your eyes for that last time you can do so in peace knowing that you have done your job and now it is time for someone else to continue the work until the end of time. Amen.