

Scripture Reading: Acts 18:1-11

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. 5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. 6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” 7 And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. 9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

"Knowing Your Vocation"

Believe it or not, this is the 70th message I am bringing from the Book of Acts: The 2nd part of Luke's orderly account written for his friend Theophilus.

- **Today we have the Apostle Paul moving on to the City of Corinth**
- **We see in this wicked city a very familiar pattern from the story of how the Spirit of God fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!**
- **We see preaching, persecution and promise!**

We will have many lessons to learn from this visit to the City of Corinth, where God promises Paul that He will bring forth a great harvest:

- **Jesus brings comfort to Paul by telling him, “I have many people in this city.”**
- **We also see God's provision for Paul in very practical ways.**

As we are obedient to God we can know assuredly that He will care for us and fill the earth with His Kingdom. It appears that Paul comes to Corinth by himself and God in His providence has brought Aquila and Priscilla from Rome to this city: We will look at their lives and this Roman persecution in more detail next week. Luke is silent as to when Aquila and Priscilla were converted so we can only speculate about that... I think it better to focus on what Luke does tell us and that is the fact that they shared a vocation: Tent-making.

We do know that Priscilla and Aquila are converted at some point because they will play an important part in Paul's later work and eventually return to Rome. But here in Corinth the stress is on the vocation they shared with the Apostle Paul and I think it is a good reminder for us all that God does not divide our lives into spiritual and secular parts as many do arguing that they somehow differ in worth...

Faithfulness is required and is demonstrated in how well we carry out an assigned task:

- **Whether it is changing one of those diapers or clocking in for another day of work, or serving the Lord's Supper or giving a sermon here at church on the Lord's Day!**

Paul makes no excuses for the time he spent during his missionary journey helping to pay the bills by making some tents...

- **In fact he argues in his Epistles that it benefited his ministry by silencing some of his critics!**

So we should see this as an important area where God brings us comfort: **Knowing our calling or vocation!** In our very hectic world today that has departed far from God's ways, a great deal of this comfort should come in just knowing that we have a calling.

Our young women who are not yet married and even younger girls among us can rest in the knowledge that God has a grand plan for their lives... Not the world's caricature of a bare-foot and pregnant women enslaved by an oppressive husband...

- **But rather the strong woman portrayed in Proverbs chapter 31 who runs her household well and brings honor to the husband who praises her and her work!**

A women who not only needs to be educated and talented to accomplish all of the tasks outlined there, but one who understands this as a life-long calling. Again, **NOT** the world's image of a neglected woman who stays at home until the kids are grown and then does not know what to do with her life...

Rather the strong Christian woman who after raising her children & being the help-meet to her husband, is used by God to train the younger women & continues to serve those in need in the Church and the broader community.

- **Will you at some point tire of ALL those diapers, dishes and children who seem to need no end of corrections?**
- **Will God test you at times, perhaps by not giving you as many children as you wanted or perhaps more than you thought you could handle?**
- **Will the man God gave you, who is called to demonstrate the love of Christ in your marriage, sometimes be more like a selfish pig? OK, maybe even often times?**

Of course the honest answer to all of these questions is **YES** at times and this is why it is so important that we rest in the calling that God has given.

- **Knowing that you are serving and obeying Him on BOTH the good days and the bad days!**

Now I fear that at times we are a bit lopsided on the issue of callings because we read Proverbs 31 on a regular basis and talk much about the honorable calling of being a homemaker! Perhaps our young men and boys wonder at times, well what about me?

- **What am I supposed to do?**

Assuming that God has not given you the gift of singleness, a gift there will be no doubt that you have if He has given it to you...

- **Assuming you are attracted to women as you grow older, then you too can rest in the comfort of knowing that God is calling you to be a husband and father.**

The training to be a good husband begins very early and the quality of that preparation is most clearly demonstrated by the relationship that a son has with his mother *[discuss my advice]*

Another important area in your Christian walk, that can easily be neglected, is what we call vocation...

- **The tent-making that we see in our text with this couple from Rome and the Apostle Paul.**
- **Your career, modern terms**

We teach and expect our young men and boys to grow up and to be ready to provide for their own families... Mom has more than enough work to keep her busy on the home front, though it is clear from Proverbs 31 that she is not to be afraid to use her skills to help bring in some extra income or make better use of the money that is available!

- **But, the goal should be to not have mom distracted from her core ministry by having to work outside the home.**

This has grown increasingly difficult in our modern world that now sees the true worth of women only coming from their work outside the home...

- **AND the financial pressures that have been added by the expectation of there being two incomes in a home.**

Our answer to this challenge comes by having our young men take seriously the need to provide for their families AND having their family AND the Church community ready and willing to come along side to help when help is needed. I strongly believe that this is one place where the truth we saw in the early chapters of Acts about the Saints having all things in common to meet needs MUST be demonstrated to a watching world today.

We must also be ready to meet the challenges that we will face from a society that has long neglected these principles: We must address the challenge of single mothers and those who are converted after making a real mess of their lives financially and/or vocationally.

So, I want to speak to our young men and boys specifically about vocation... If this sounds like a topical sermon this morning, it is because it is! When you preach exegetically you will usually find those areas that need special attention in the text. I will certainly not be exhaustive... [Mention tapes]

- **First we must remember that our vocation, our calling to work is rooted deeply in the dominion mandate...**

Work is NOT a part of the fall...

- **But rather it is one of the major areas where we bring glory to God!**

This does not mean that the fall of man into sin has not affected work: It has, just as man's sin stains our relationships, our own individual lives and even the creation around us. There is now an unnatural element of toil in our work and we struggle against the weeds that choke out and try to destroy the labor of our hands. However, just as we don't give up on marriage and love because sin will rear its ugly head at times...

- **So we should not disparage work and earning an honest living.**

So we should be greatly encouraged when we read in Genesis one that, "God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful & multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

- **A mandate repeated to Noah after the flood so we know it was not canceled by our fall into sin!**

The concept of honest work is pictured as a blessing throughout the Old and New Testaments: All of the laws given to God's people or wisdom found in Proverbs regarding our labor, honesty, property rights, and other economic principles are intended to help us do well in our vocations, so we can bring Glory to God. We are told in Proverbs to look to the ant as an industrious creature for our example and to avoid the sluggard... Warnings given with some of the best images we have from Scripture...

- **The man on his bed...**
- **The man afraid to go outside...**
- **The man who can't lift his hand...**
- **So we are called to be honest, hard-working and ready to provide for a family and to help the poor!**
- **What we call The Protestant Work Ethic!**

But the question remains, how does one know what his calling will be?

- **We are not stamped at birth with plumber or engineer on our forehead, and God has not given your Pastor a vocation list for the congregation.**

It is very similar to the challenge of finding the right helpmeet that God intends for you to marry...

First & foremost, trusting God!

- **He has given wisdom we are to learn; rules we are to follow; and there are people God will bring into your life to help you make wise decisions!**

For example, with marriage, despite what the world would like us to think today, you young men will have to marry a woman and she has to be a Christian woman who loves God and has given her life to serving Jesus! The same applies in finding a vocation that will provide for your family:

- **You can't be a bank robber nor a burger flipper at McDonalds.**

I think the bank-robber restriction is pretty self-explanatory...

But, I want to make sure you understand that I am not saying that all menial jobs that pay a very low wage are wrong. They can often be how someone learns a trade and lead to better jobs!

- **In fact if we get back to the Biblical concept of apprenticeship you might have a young man working for nothing for an extended period of time as he learns a trade! *[just imagine how many state and federal regulations you would be breaking by doing such a thing today!]***

So our young men and boys are still left with some personal questions:

- **What is God calling me to do... What will my vocation be?**

There is no magic formula, but I have seen over the years some of the ways God often reveals such things... To those who seek His guidance!

- **First as you grow older you will see that you have talents in particular areas which are often tied to a love for doing certain things.**

Someone who loves and understands animals could well grow up to be a very good veterinarian.

There may also be some areas where you have some restrictions in talent or even health *[tell my story]*

I mentioned that your talents might be tied to something that you love, but the two may not always go together:

- **Sometimes you may have a love for a certain thing, say wood-working but find it difficult to do.**

Your love of that craft may cause you to work much harder than others who have more talent and thus you might well end up being the better carpenter.

- **If they have talent and love in a particular area, then I would heartily encourage a young person to pursue that area as a vocation.**

As you grow older the dreams you may have for a vocation & early training you have received may begin to be matched with opportunities: Sometimes well, and sometimes poorly. Your study of history may have given you a great love for buggy whips & you may have begun to make some as a hobby & found you are very good at it.

- **The problem with thinking about this as a vocation is the fact that the market for buggy whips has greatly diminished in the past hundred years!**

Matching you talents and your loves with a vocation where you will have an opportunity to work is where prayer & wisdom must have a greater role...

- **And it is very important for you to turn to the wisdom of others to help make the right decisions!**

And finally, as you grow older you encounter the need to have work...

This can come at a younger age if the family has need as was the case with many of the parents of my generation!

- It will certainly be a reality once you are married and responsible to care and provide for your family.

The goal should be to have all of these things come together...

- To find a vocation that has you working in a job or business that meets the needs of your family while allowing you to do something that you are talented at and love doing.

However, we must remember that the effects of the fall will still be felt even in these ideal circumstances:

- You will toil at times, frustrated even by the work that you love.
- There will be weeds, interruptions and conflicts that keep you from doing all you could do in this field.

This is where we must learn that hard lesson about being anxious for nothing and to trust that God knows what He is doing in our lives!

- God provided Paul with both companionship and opportunity when he first came to Corinth.

I like to believe that Aquila and Priscilla came to Christ as a result of Paul sharing the Good News with them as they labored faithfully together in their trade, but like I said, Luke is silent here so I cannot be too emphatic. Something else that Luke does not tell us is why was Paul a tent-maker?

- It is likely the result of some or all of the very principles I have outlined here today.

It is something Paul would have been exposed to in his home town of Tarsus where goat hair was used to produce very fine cloth for tents. Paul learned this trade out of a love for it or seeing that it could meet his needs. And of course God in His providence gave Paul a trade that could be practiced with simple tools that could be taken on these missionary journeys!

- Something that Saul of Tarsus would never have dreamed of!

As I mentioned, there is much for us to learn about vocations in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, we see the great examples of Jesus who practiced as a carpenter, Peter & Andrew or John and James as fishermen, and the Apostle Paul as the tent-maker.

Along with these examples we find many instructions to servants and masters and the command for men to provide for their families.

I want to leave us this morning reflecting on the words that Paul would write some years later to Titus as he encouraged him as a shepherd of God's people... We can see clearly how the Apostle saw the need to have BOTH sound doctrine and sound practice. The Spirit of God knows where history is going and we are to be His instruments serving well in the Church in our families AND in our vocations.

Titus 2:1 "1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

6 Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, 7 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, 8 sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. 9 Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. 15 Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you."

-- May we be those who hear & obey!