

Mission Possible

A true story. Dr. Robert Lesslie, an emergency room doctor in a small city in South Carolina, tells about a yard sale that he & his wife held as they got ready to move to a smaller home. They had stuff for sale everywhere—not just in the yard, but in all the downstairs rooms in their house as well. By 9 am, the place was packed with people—the kitchen, dining room, living room. Dr. Lesslie was trying to stand out of the way, but be available if anyone had questions, so he was over in a corner of the living room, when a man walked up to him. Someone he didn't know—someone he'd never even seen before. But the man just walked up and started talking to him, as if he'd known him all his life.

“This your place?” he asked.

“Yes, it is. Are you looking for anything in particular?”

The man just stood there, and sort of cocked his head, staring at him. Then he said, “Tell me, what is your ministry?”

Dr. Lesslie wasn't sure he heard him correctly. “My ministry?”

“Yes. What is your ministry?” he repeated.

The doctor stood there and thought about that for a minute. What *was* his ministry? Maybe he should tell the man that he was a doctor, and *that* was his ministry. But somehow, that wasn't what the man was asking. He wanted to know how he was living out his faith. Dr. Lesslie was struggling for an answer when his wife called to him to come out to the kitchen for a minute to help her. When he returned to the living room, the man was gone. He looked for

him both inside and outside the house, but the man had disappeared, leaving the challenging question behind: “What is your ministry?”

[Adapted from *Angels on the Night Shift* by Robert Lesslie, pp. 208-209]

What is your ministry? What is your God-given mission? You see, God has a mission planned for you.

That was true for Moses; God gave Moses a mission. 3500 years ago, God spoke to Moses while Moses was at work, shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law in the wilderness of Midian. Moses saw a bush that was burning, yet was not consumed by flames. And then he heard God’s voice calling his name, “Moses, Moses.” God spoke of the misery of His people, living in crushing slavery in the most powerful country on the face of the earth, in Egypt. And then, God said: “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons [and daughters] of Israel, out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:10)

However, this scripture is not just ancient Biblical history. God speaks to each one of us in the same way as he did to Moses: “Come, I will send you...” That’s what it means to be baptized, as Philip Milem was this morning. It means that God has a claim on our lives, adopting us as God’s own sons & daughters through Jesus Christ, and preparing us for serving others in Christ’s name. Children & youth: God has given you a mission. High school graduates & college students & young adults: God has given you a mission. Parents and grandparents: God has given you a mission. Those in the workforce and those who are retired: God has given you a mission.

The beautiful solo which Lois Fowler sang this morning expresses this truth:

There were so many others that He might have chosen to follow Him:
Others with learning and greater distinction to follow Him;
Men with authority and forceful ability who know how to speak and be heard.
I don't know exactly why I'm here at all, but today I follow my Lord...
For he chose me. He chose me.
I could not say no when He said, "Follow Me and you'll be a fisher of men."
From now on, I will not look back on the things left behind,
He chose me to follow him.

["He Chose Me" by Mosie Lister, ©Lillenas Publishing Company, 1982.]

God has given you a mission. The emphasis fall squarely on "you." However, the emphasis falls equally on mission. God has given you a mission. What is that God-given calling? It is different for each one of us. It is the place where God needs you most.

For Moses, his life's mission was to demand freedom for the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, and then to lead them for 40 years through the wilderness until they came to the land of Israel, the land God had promised them.

Where is it that God needs your assistance? It may be where you are right now. Your mission may be your current job, your profession. It may be your volunteer service—for instance, with the North Rose Fire Department. Your mission may be as a parent or grandparent. It may be through Christian service: as a Sunday School or VBS teacher or youth leader or nursery worker, or as a church worship leader or musician, or on the Mission Trip to Kentucky, or at the Wesley Thrift Shop, or taking care of the church buildings or finances, or visiting the sick and elderly on our Lay Visiting Team, or through the ministry of prayer.

God has given you a mission. This mission may also be something totally new: a place of need where you can help, where you can make a difference. It may involve giving up or reducing your current responsibilities to focus on this new area of service.

God knows where he wants you. How important it is to ask him to guide us, to give us clarity about this place of service. As we pray, sometimes the answer is immediately apparent, at other times, it's only gradually that we become aware of God's plans for our lives.

I've included a little card in today's bulletin. It has a quote about our life's mission from the 19th century spiritual leader, Cardinal John Henry Newman. I'd invite you to take this card home with you, put it in your wallet or your purse or your Bible, and think about these words:

God Has Given Me a Mission

God has created me to do him

some definite service:

He has committed some work to me,

which he has not committed to another.

I have my mission... I am a link in a chain,

a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught.

I shall do good.

I shall do his work.

God has given you a mission.

This morning, we have put the emphasis on the word, “you,” and on the word, “mission.” Now, let us put the emphasis on God. God has given you a mission. Our response to God is likely to be similar to Moses’ reaction: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” (Exodus 3:11) Who am I?... in other words, you’ve got the wrong person, God. I’m not qualified for this job. I’m not smart enough, or strong enough, or religious enough or wise enough... This is mission impossible.

God’s answer to Moses is simply this: “I will be with you.” (Exodus 3: 12)

And God’s answer to us is the same: “I will be with you.” God’s presence transforms mission impossible to mission possible. It is God who gives you a mission, and it is God who will give you the tools necessary to fulfill the responsibilities he lays on your heart.

Greg Gilbert tells a story which illustrates the depth of God’s promise.

Greg started trying to teach his son to swim early on. It was a chore. Around 2 years old at the time, the little guy didn't like getting water in his face in the bathtub, much less this massive ocean of a pool he was staring at now. At first, "teaching him to swim" meant getting him to splash around a bit on the top step, and maybe putting his lips in the water enough to blow bubbles if he was feeling really brave.

Eventually he convinced him to walk around with him in the shallow end, with a death-grip around his neck of course. Once they mastered that, it was time for the Big Show—Jumping Off the Side. Fulfilling his God-given duty as a daddy, he lifted his son out of the pool, stood him on the side, and said, "Come on, jump!"

The look on his face, in about two seconds, went from confusion to dawning understanding, to amused rejection, to outright contempt. He frowned and said, "No. I go see Mommy." Again acting faithfully on his solemn responsibility as a father, he refused to surrender, chased him down, and eventually convinced him (with various bribes) to come back to the pool.

And so they came to the moment of truth.

Greg jumped into the water again and stood in front of his son with my arms outstretched, watching him bob up and down in his swimmy-diaper as one-year-olds do when they kind of want to jump, but not really. "C'mon, kiddo," he said. "I'm right here. I'll catch you. I promise!" He looked at me half skeptically, did one more little wind-up, bouncing at the knees, and then fell into the pool with what was more a flop than a jump.

And Greg caught him.

After that they were off to the races. "Doot 'gain, Daddy! Doot 'gain!" And so commenced half an hour of jump, catch, lift, reset, jump, catch, lift, reset.

When it was over, Greg started to worry that maybe his son had gotten a bit too comfortable with the water. What if he wandered out to the pool when no one was there with him? Would he remember all the times he'd safely jumped into the water and decide he had this pool thing conquered? Would he jump again without his Daddy there to catch him?

Over the next few days Greg watched his son around the pool, and what he saw both comforted him as a parent and touched him deeply as a father. Never once did his little boy think about jumping into the water—at least not unless his daddy was standing underneath him with his arms out, promising to catch him. And then he would fly!

You see, despite all his apparent successes, Greg's son's trust was never in his own ability to handle the water. His trust was in his father, and in his father's promise: "C'mon kiddo. Jump. I promise I'll catch you."

[Adapted from Greg Gilbert, What Is the Gospel? (Crossway, 2010), pp. 71-72]

God has given you a mission. And then God says: "C'mon kiddo. Jump. I promise I'll catch you." Amen.