***“Just Do Your Job”***

A picture containing grass, outdoor, sport, athletic game

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**Lectionary**

**6 October 2019**

**17th Sunday After Pentecost**

Luke 17:5-10

There is no denying that we are right in the midst of a swirling seasonal phenomenon. No, not hurricane season. No, not the season of freakish first snowfalls. It is, of course, football season.

There are two distinct “fronts” to football season. There are the teams themselves, all the actual players and coaches and front office staff. But then there are also the fans, all those whose devotion, commitment, and excitement have made it possible for football to become the centerpiece of our autumns. In the words of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005): “Football fans share a universal language that cuts across many cultures and many personality types. A serious football fan is never alone. We are legion, and football is often the only thing we have in common.”

Both the teams and their fans have their own distinct duties—their own “jobs.” For fans the job is to show up, cheer for your team, question every call that goes against your team, and to eat outrageously large amounts of really tasty, really bad-for-your-arteries food. For some hometown fans that means “tail-gating”—taking the fan base to the parking lot of the stadium, supporting the team on-site. For others being a good fan, doing your fan “job,” is a long-distance exercise, carried out in crowded living rooms in front of big-screen TVs, littering the floor with chips, pizza crusts, dip drips, and other mysterious stains. For others being a good fan is taking off your shirt and waving it in sub-zero temperature. What did Dave Barry say about fans? “Sharks are as tough as those football fans who take their shirts off during games in Chicago in January, only more intelligent.”

Of course, the biggest job falls upon the teams themselves—both the players and the coaches. Bill Belicheck, head coach of the incredibly successful New England Patriots, is famous for making one essential, absolute demand of all his players. Anyone here this morning know what that is?

”Do your job.”

Belicheck’s simple demand is not unlike that of another legendary coach, Vince Lombardi. Lombardi was known for addressing his team when they were in a slump by holding up a football and declaring, “This is a football.” There are times when you need to go back to basics: “This is a football. Learn to Catch it. Throw it. Keep someone else from catching it.” That was the player’s “job.”

A player’s “job” is far more complex than a fan’s. It takes a lot more than just “showing up” to get the “job” done each week, at every game. At the very least “doing the job” entails self-discipline, deep preparation, working hard, paying attention to details, and putting the team first. “Just do your job” most importantly involves, not fitting “in” to some job description, but fitting “together” in a play formation.

In this week’s gospel text Jesus provides images that help to flesh out the “job” of being a disciple. A disciple aims to correctly hear and follow Jesus’ message and mission. The lectionary reading begins with the example of the “mustard seed.” But in Luke’s text two other examples preface this week’s text. In 17:1-2 Jesus warns his followers that if their behavior should cause another, a “little one,” to stumble in their faithfulness, it “would be better if a millstone were hung around their necks and they were thrown into the sea.” Behaving in a way that causes others to misbehave is definitely not “doing your job” as a disciple of Jesus and a scout of the in-breaking kingdom of God.

Even more challenging is the next item in a disciple’s “job description.” Jesus declares that even “if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.” In other words, a continuing, never wavering attitude of forgiveness is central to the job description of “disciple.”

Having heard these two intimidating requirements for their roles as disciples, Jesus’ companions now beg him to “Increase their faith,” so that they might accomplish these ambitions. Jesus’ response calls his followers on the carpet, claiming that if they had but the “faith the size of a mustard seed” they could accomplish miraculous things. Actually, biblical scholars suggest this “mustard seed” image could be heard two ways. The most popular is to focus on the size of the mustard seed—it is a tiny, seemingly insignificant seed, which grows up into a shrub of impressive stature. If that is the thrust of Jesus’ admonition it seems to say that his disciples do not even have the tiniest bit of genuine faith in their hearts, and so all of Jesus’ discipleship instructions appear beyond their abilities.

Other scholars look at the “mustard seed” as a template of faithfulness. The seed, though tiny, “believes” that it has the ability to strengthen and grow into a large and sturdy mustard plant. The mustard seed has faith in its creator to be able to grow into this promised new creation.

But Jesus’ fourth admonition in this series stresses the “do your job” directive to his disciples more than any other. They are to “do their job.” Why? Not to keep others from failing, not to be a source of forgiveness, not to be an example of faith, but simply, because they are his disciples. They are to do what they are to do because that is what God has called and commissioned them to do. Doing what God expects of us is the “minimum daily requirement” (mdr) of discipleship, not some “special” gift or grace. As another sports icon, Nike, has noted: Just do it.

Jesus’ directives point his disciples towards a harsh reality. They are called to “do their job.” But on their own, there is no way they can actually “do their job.” In order to be a disciple and “do your job,” you cannot depend upon yourself and your own abilities. How depressing is it to think that one slip-up in your own life could cause others to fail in their own faith journeys. That thought is a “millstone” of misery. How exhausting is it to realize that the grace and forgiveness you offer to the most grievous sinner, the most hurtful enemy, must be extended again tomorrow—and tomorrow—and tomorrow—and each day of your life without exception. We have a “job” to do. We are called by Jesus to “do our job.” But without the grace of God, without the redeeming, restoring grace of Christ, we know we just cannot do it.

Emil Brunner summed up this seemingly contrary call to service when he noted:

We are accustomed to require an ethic to be practicable. If this is what we want, then we should turn to Aristotle! The ethic of the Gospel is not practicable because it is serious . . . To take . . . the will of God seriously, leads to the admission that it is impossible to do it. But the impossibility is no excuse.

Besides football coaches, CEOs and leadership gurus love to quote the “do your job” mantra of Bill Belicheck. These professionals are all about setting goals and examples and making convenient check-off lists for reaching those “job” goals.

They make “lists” like:

1. Communicate the game plan.
2. Set expectations for each player.
3. Practice the fundamentals.
4. Provide immediate feedback.
5. Encourage trust and inspire confidence.

Those sensible, step-by-step, orchestrated plans might work in some scenarios, but they do not work for Jesus disciples because they miss the most basic ground rule. We cannot do it on our own. The “job” of being a disciple of Jesus is not a singular undertaking. As disciples our first “job,” our first realization, must be the confession that we can’t “do it” on our own. We cannot finish our faith journey, we cannot bring the message and mission of Jesus as the Christ, the Redeemer, to anyone, anywhere, without having Jesus by our side, without having encountered God’s grace. And we need each other to “do our job.” Our “job” requires us, not to fit in, but to fit together in God’s mission in the world.

The Greek word for “grace” is “charis.” To “do your job” is a grace, a charis, that leads to a life of eu-charistia, a life of thanksgiving, a live of gratitude. And the charis that leads to eucharistia issues in charisms or gifts of the Spirit. But all charisms that come from eucharistia begin in charis, begin in grace.

“Just do your job,” or in Christianese, “Just do you calling,” is not a form of works-righteousness. It is a form of worship and adoration and love. We do our mission, we do our calling, because we love the one who called us and commissioned us. And we look forward to that day when we hear the words from the one who chose us, “Well done, beloved, and welcome. Your life brings me great pleasure.”