

## International Worship Service er.baut - Dec 16, 2012

### Vocation on Vacation

The time of advent is a period of expectation. It is also a time of pausing and looking back. And as Christians we ask in the presence of Him "Who is, Who was and Who will be, if we are still on target - on target to meet the king of peace. And as we take a breath in this time before Christmas, we also take a look at our minor and major goals in life. We dare to have a glance at "the Whole" of our vocation in life. And as the headline of this sermon says: We give ourselves a break looking at our "vocation on vacation", and we give the noise and Everyday's hassle a timeout. We do like the disciples that were coming back from their first outreach after being sent out by Jesus with specific things to do. Now they are back home, sitting together with the master, reflecting, re-adjusting their agenda.

I read some decisive passages from Mark 3 and Luke 9 as a compilation:

*Mark 3,13-15*

*[After speaking to a large crowd and having cured many and cast out unclean spirits Jesus withdrew. And] He went up the mountain [Lk 6,12f.] to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when the day came, he called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him,*

*Luke 9,1-6*

*and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. 3 He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money-- not even an extra tunic. 4 Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. 5 Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." 6 They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.*

*Luke 9,10-17: 10*

*On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.*

*11 When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who*

*needed to be cured. 12 The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place."*

*13 But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish-- unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."*

*14 For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so and made them all sit down. 16 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. 17 And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.*

As we sit here as quite normal people - as students and teachers engaged in our everyday tasks, this rhythm of spending time at our desks, visiting lectures or spending time in the office or at home - we may regard our situation a little like experiencing the muted sound of a chirping bird from inside a room and through the heavy glass of a closed window. Because compared to these exposed and vivid vocational stories in the Bible our existence appears to be rather less exciting than the life of a real apostle...

But let's see if we maybe can get a little closer, a little more into it: Let us have the waypoints of this mission pass before our inner eyes like screenshots. What is happening? **1. Jesus prays. 2. He calls them. 3. He sends them out. 4. He spends time with them. 5. He challenges them.** These things do not necessarily require a mountain or dusty Palestinian roads. They are quite compatible with desktop driven lives.

### 1. Jesus prays

In the beginning there was relationship - the relationship with God. In the beginning there was this retreat from daily hassle. This time of inner quiet restores one's senses from the craziness of the previous week. We need this spiritual reset to help us discern the one voice within the tangle of a thousand voices - the one word, which puts all the other words to rest. We always see Jesus taking this timeout after periods of strain and effort. Wherever he went, it seems to be the case that everybody wanted something from him. People were looking for a personal word, they asked for healing, they wanted relief from bondage. But Jesus was by no means always accessible. He withdrew once in a while and had a "creative" time with his father in heaven. It was

not the will of the people he sought during those periods, but “Thy will be done” - this was the standard then. It is the yardstick of our existence. We need to take measure here once in a while so that we don’t lose our bearings.

## **2. Jesus appoints them**

Here we find the whole answer to the question: Am I called? Do I have what it takes to be called by God? Well, it sounds a little generic and disinterested. It says: *He called to him those whom he wanted.* Period. However: This man, who just put his life back in order before God and prayed: “Thy will be done” he now decides in a moment of highest Sovereignty: I WANT THOSE! Jesus, the one true man who is a true man, because he lives in complete harmony with God. And because of this God’s will is his will.

We learn something about prayer here. The goal of Prayer is not that we pass on to God as much information as possible. God does not need that. He doesn’t watch the News, either. He knows the facts. But prayer is the place of relating to God. It is the place where my soul can breathe and tune in to the frequency of God. And accordingly in the choice of Jesus we truly find God’s election: “Those are the ones!”

But what special qualities do they have? What is required of a person to be used by God? Strangely enough it’s not about qualities, but the decisive term is: “to be with him.” *He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him.* This is it. The ones that he appointed were those that followed his call “to be with him”. One that goes with Jesus is appointed. One who lets himself be called away from his old situation where everything’s centered on me, my job, my success - called into a new existence which is open to receive life out of the hand of Another, of a greater one who provides what is needed. Life made by God is not meant to be self-sustainable. God is not IKEA. The secret of life is all about a remarkable turn from “me, myself and I” to a larger You. - And we can observe this with remarkable clarity in the person of Jesus.

## **3. Jesus sends them out**

Once again: Which qualities does it take to be appointed by God? None! And the reason is: God does not appoint the gifted, but he endows those that he appoints. God is not like the central character in the movie “Oceans Eleven” who wants to rob a casino and therefore needs all kinds of specialists. God does not need you! But God loves you. This is an important distinction! And because God loves you, he wants you to be with him. As a creator he doesn’t

need to consider special expertise. He creates what he needs. Before sending the disciples out he takes care of what is needed for the job to come.

It says: *He gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to cure diseases.* They are supposed to proclaim the gospel message in word and deed and God provides what is usually missing: power and authority. These two things rarely come together: Often people have the capacity and the will to do things, but they are either not authorized to do the job or lack the ability to do so. Or they have the expertise but are so worn out from their daily requirements that they are simply lacking the power to go for it. But God wants to give both to his disciples. What a promise to his people!

So what are the qualities Jesus gives to his disciples when he sends them out? Do they get a crash course in rhetoric? Theology 101? No. Education is of great importance to him; however, it is not so much a pragmatic education for specific skills. It is an education of the heart. We notice for example when God calls people, he regards authenticity to be very important: How come? They are supposed to be true to their identity in regard to their calling. They are supposed to take nothing with them. They shall have no back-up plan to secure themselves. But they shall proclaim with their entire lives: I come here with nothing other than the trust in the power and authority that God gave to me. He leads me on my path. That shall be sufficient. My speech, my deeds and my attitude proclaim nothing but the one important thing: God’s reign of love has begun. He rules. And where people are willing to surrender their lives to him, they receive healing and wholeness in body and soul. It is taken care of for them. They don’t have to worry. This is authenticity! This is the shape of the creator’s word. It does what says. And it says what it does. So is Jesus. And so are his disciples.

Do you realize God’s sending of the apostles is no peculiar special treatment for the spiritually gifted or the abundantly successful? It is actually all about us and our lives, be it as a student or as a staff member at the university. The message is: be an authentic person who is called by God to proclaim in your own personal manner that God is at work in this world. Send this message through every available channel. Speak about it. Make his reign tangible by your deeds, and show an attitude that displays the hope that there must be something larger than life, as it is commonly perceived. Live as someone who is being cared for and who therefore has his hands free for others.

## **4. Jesus spends time with them**

There is one thing that we should not forget. The finding and living of one’s own calling does not come over night. It requires training and

implementation. Jesus did not say: “Today I appoint you and tomorrow you live up to it.” Jesus proceeded with his disciples step by step. He helped them to start walking in his shoes.

His understanding of education implied “on the job training”. First he drew them according to ancient school pedagogic everywhere he went. His motto then was: “I do - you watch!” I proclaim the gospel in words and deeds. You just observe. He did not explain a whole lot, did not argue about it. His leading style was rather directive and he served as an example to them. But this changed when time went on. Partially he engaged them in little tasks and even allowed them to face humbling moments of distress. They needed to realize that they were not the ones to bring about the kingdom of God. Life many times poses situations where we simply must depend on His grace. It’s not us! It’s he who does it!

As their commitment and dedication grew stronger and their faith grew deeper, Jesus stepped back and granted them more responsibility. At the same time he supported them with extra time together for advice and discussion. Later he passed on his legacy to his spiritually grown disciples when he gave them the Great Commission, which was an expansion of his own personal agenda.

The episode immediately before the feeding of the multitudes, that we are looking at now, is basically some kind of retreat Jesus provides for his disciples after they have just returned from the mission field. They had received their calling. They had proven themselves in everyday life. As in our life, some things had worked out great...others went rather poorly.

And now it is important to find rest for a while, to spend time with the master, time alone with God to find clarity in the mind and re-order life so that it does not lose its direction. It needs rest and reflection, so that what has happened can become experience. Otherwise it just flies by. The disciples do what is important to do to prevent life from evaporating in breathlessness.

*On their return the apostles tell Jesus all they had done.* Do you hear that? *All* they tell him. Everything! Whoever wants to tell everything first needs to hold on and ask: What has happened, anyway? That takes time. Time not only to list noteworthy things but also to listen to its emotional connotation. How did I evaluate this? How did that challenge my perception? Why did this one incident evoke such harsh response from me? These are the notions that easily fall under the table in the hassle of life. The same with Jesus’ encouragement that we receive through a verse maybe or a notion in prayer, a thought which sticks to us and does not want to fade. It is important to

reserve time for these moments of conversation with God, so that they can root into our existence. Without dwelling on these things everything will remain an episode. This is a huge problem of our lifestyle nowadays. Permanent access to the media and telecommunications is poison to the inner man.

That is why Jesus *took them with him and withdrew privately* to a place where they were protected from external intrusions. Be sure: they all shut off their cell phones. - Do you have such a place? Do you have this place and time where you can leave to Bethsaida to be alone with God? Do you have this place to sharpen your calling, where you take time to think *why* you do all these things you do? How does this serve the larger goal that God has provided for you and the world through his kingdom message? This is important. Otherwise joy and confidence wear out on the way and your calling dissolves in busyness.

### **5. Jesus challenges them anew**

After the break with Jesus everyone was sent out into the world again. This usually happens sooner rather than later. The routine gets you back. You can count on that. So do the disciples. „Surprise! Guess who!“ People will find you! And the calling will once again have to be proven. Jesus tests it with just a tiny, seemingly mean demand: *You give them something to eat.* Yeah, right! Let’s do the impossible... Well, everything is possible with the creator - Now the agenda is to stay with Jesus in going out again. “To hold fast the calling” means to keep the sound of His voice in my ear while I am going. Not to forget the word. We play it by ear. We live by his word, we live from his interpretation of our life, not from what others attribute to us. We do not live from the money we earn, either. But we do live from the call that becomes flesh in us, becomes our calling.

The disciples almost forgot about that: They are just about to say: “This is not gonna fly, *unless we go and buy food*”. They look *down* into their wallet. Jesus looks *up* to heaven. What a picture! He blesses the few things. It is enough for everyone - and even more. That’s how it goes when God enters life.

Advent is the time of expectation and waiting for the king. And he will certainly come. How can you get prepared? Find and follow your calling! Then he will set the table for you. You will see.