

Exodus 18:13-27 “Leaders Needed!” March 17-19, 2018
Pastor Don Sutton – St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

Introduction

In late 2016 a book came out entitled *Growing Young* that focus on churches retaining and involving youth in ministry. At the same time the book debunks all kinds of myths like you have to have a young hip pastor, be in a state-of-the-art facility, and be off-the-charts cool, it pointed to following six key things on which churches needed to focus:

- Empathize with today’s youth – their lives are not as easy as you think;
- Emphasize the life and words of Jesus – youth need and like to hear this;
- Fuel a warm and welcoming culture – culture eats strategy for breakfast;
- Prioritize young people and families everywhere;
- Be the best neighbors – have a positive impact on your community; and,
- Entrust and empower youth for leadership and ministry.

These are common-sensed things for our church and others to work on. But it’s this last point that we focus on today – entrust and empower youth for leadership and ministry.

I don’t believe that it’s a secret that in some churches if you’re not 40 or older and a member of the ruling clan, you don’t lead. In many churches today leaders, coordinators, and doers are burning out because there is no one to replace them. And in many churches there are people sitting on the sidelines because they don’t think they’re needed or no one engages and empowers them to serve. These are situations for: **Help Needed!**

Today we go back 3400 years to look at a situation that we could entitle: **Help Needed!** We consider today’s Old Testament reading in Exodus 18.

Exodus 18:13-16

¹³ The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. ¹⁴ When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?” ¹⁵ Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. ¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions.”

Setting

Understand the setting. God had miraculously brought the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Several million people are camped in a place called Rephidim. They have all kinds of problems and there are all kinds of issues to deal with. Moses is the go-to guy.

Moses family and his father-in-law, Jethro, have joined Moses. Jethro, who now believes in the God of Israel, perceives that Moses is in trouble. Moses is near-sighted and doesn’t see the situation well. The job is too big. Moses is too small. Help is needed!

Today

This same thing can happen today with lay leaders and called workers. Why? Sometimes they think they are the only ones who can do ministry. Sometimes some may think that if they give up work they lose power or they aren’t doing their job. Sometimes they think too highly of themselves and too lowly of God’s people around them.

However, sometimes leaders keep plugging along even when it's not good because they've tried to engage fellow Christians for leadership and other kinds of service, but those Christians weren't stepping up. People in these settings had their own near-sightedness. Either they thought gospel ministry is not that important forgetting that we're dealing with eternal destinies and purpose, peace, and power in daily life - we're impacting families, communities, and our country. Or sometimes God's people think too lowly of themselves and the gifts God has given them. And sometimes it's selfishness. They're ready to seek help when they need it but won't give help when it's needed.

In each case it's sinful near-sightedness. It shows us why the Son of God had to come to earth to serve as our substitute. As we see Jesus, we see him humbly and faithfully serving the way God wants us to serve. He had come not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. We see him engaging, equipping, empowering, and encouraging people in service. He's doing this for God and for us because we don't do it to the extent God wants. We see Jesus sacrificing himself on Calvary's cross and suffering his Father's justice to deliver us from his Father's condemnation for our failures and bring us forgiveness and eternal life. As we journey with Jesus we are reminded so clearly how in love he did this all for us. The result is that we have peace with God and a place in his family.

Transition: As God the Father sent his Son to be our Savior, he also sent Jethro to give Moses a wake-up! So Jethro gave Moses some fatherly advice.

Exodus 18:17-18

¹⁷ Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.

Jethro is concerned about Moses and the people. In respect to Moses, one man couldn't and shouldn't do all the work. God had put a lot into developing Moses for leadership – almost 40 years in the household of the king of Egypt where Moses got an education that would serve him well as a leader; 40 years as a shepherd in Midian where Moses learned not only humility and hard work, he learned about family life; miracles that convinced Moses he was dealing with God and that there wasn't anything with which God couldn't deal.

In respect to the people of Israel, they were the people of God. God had put a lot into delivering them from slavery. They were the people to whom and through whom God would first give his word. They were the people from whom the Savior would come.

It's important today to remember how God invests a lot into the development of his people. Thousands of dollars and hours go into the development of called workers starting in the home, in the church, in the community, and through worker training. God doesn't want us to wear out our workers making them work alone and not developing new leaders and workers to work with them and eventually replace them.

Called workers need to remember how God has invested much into their fellow Christians creating and cultivating faith, and gifting them for service. We all need to remember that God's plan is not that we be a one-man band, but a multi-person orchestra!

Transition: Jethro continued with his advice.

Exodus 18:19-22

¹⁹ Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. ²⁰ Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. ²¹ But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²² Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them

bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

On the sermon card we are asked to summarize Jethro's advice verse by verse with one word. How about this:

- v. 19a – Listen! I'm seeing things you don't.
- v. 19b – Trust! God is with you.
- v. 19c – Pray! Bring disputes to the Lord. He'll guide you.
- v. 20 – Prepare! Teach people so they can make decisions for themselves. As you do, you'll prepare leaders.
- v. 21a – Enlist! Select capable, qualified men.
- v. 21b – Authorize! Appoint them as officials.
- v. 22a – Entrust! Empower them as judges.
- v. 22b – Support! Have them take care of regular things and help them with the difficult ones.

Transition: Note the result Jethro says that Moses and Israel will experience.

Exodus 18:23

²³ If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵ He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²⁶ They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.²⁷ Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

- V. 22c – It will make the load lighter.
- V. 23a – You will be better off.
- V. 23b – The people will be satisfied – literally, at peace.

God's leaders, workers, and people, in general are better off when we share in ministry and work together.

So Moses did what Jethro advised. While things were probably not perfect among the people of Israel, the set-up freed up Moses for important things, like receiving God's law on Mt. Sinai and implementing it among the people.

Qualifications for Leadership

Did you notice the qualifications for leadership that Jethro mentioned? Fear of God. Trustworthy. Hate dishonest gain.

I think it's happened more than a few times that congregations have resorted to looking for warm bodies when it comes to filling leadership positions. Note how the early church in Jerusalem looked for leaders who were spiritually mature and wise. Take time this week to read what God prescribes for New Testament called workers and lay leaders according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. God wants people who are spiritually mature, who faithfully into word and sacrament, who have a good reputation, who are good examples for others, and who are gifted to lead and serve.

Leadership & Ministry Today

I mentioned earlier in our message that leadership and service is important in God's church today. But today many leaders and member ministers are struggling with ministry. Who serves as the Jethro's today?

In our circles it's our district leaders, our circuit pastors to pastor pastors and help congregations in times of trouble. We have workshops and programs to train leaders. Our Synod has the Commission on Congregational Counseling that helps congregations evaluate, plan, and implement ministry including structure and staffing. Prof. David Scharf works closely with this. Our synod also provides assessment and accreditation services for schools and so does our state's private school accreditation association. Crossroads Consulting with Pastor Elton Stroh helps congregations with leadership and direction in ministry. There's also a little-known WELS para-synodical – within our synod but not supported by it – called Grace in Action. There is information about it in our bulletin.

Someone recently said to me at a fellowship meal, "I heard you work for another ministry besides St. Paul's." I responded that over a year ago I was called to serve part-time as the leader of Grace in Action. As such I also work with our Ministry Leadership Institute. Supported by fees, foundation grants, and gifts from people like you we help ministries evaluate what they are doing, plan what they need to do, get traction with their plans, develop leaders, build teams, and promote wellness. This is to glorify God and to make and nurture the next disciple. God has blessed this ministry immensely and it is expanding rapidly.

St. Paul's

But what about us? Certainly all these services are out there as possibilities to help us. But there are things we continually need to do. They include:

- Thank God for our church and ministry, our leaders, workers, and seek his blessing on them.
- Care for your called workers, lay leaders and volunteers and regularly show them appreciation.
- Evaluate ministry, set proper direction, & strive to get traction.
- Determine our needs for ministry – leaders and servers – and let the needs be known.
- Help people understand that God wants all to serve and help them see their gifts and strengths for service.
- Assess the gifts and strengths of our members and help them to find their niche.
- Nurture a warm and welcoming culture that seeks to include people in leadership and ministry.
- Personally be willing to determine your gifts and in response to God's love, to step up in service.
- Train and support leaders and volunteers.
- Encourage our youth in their faith and encourage them to use their gifts in service.
- Remember and remind each other that God is with us to help and bless us as we serve.

Summary

Help needed to...

- glorify God,
- lighten the load,
- use the gifts of God's people
- get more done.