

'Recruiting, Training, Serving'

Response: Ps. 98: 1-6 Jer 17: 5-8

1Cor 10: 31-11: 1 Mark 1: 40-45

February 18/18 St. A., Whitby

Some of you know who James Doohan is: for those who don't, he was the Canadian actor who played Scotty on Star Trek. He was born in Vancouver & was one of many Canadians who landed on Juno Beach, during World War 2. He was a pilot & captain in the Royal Canadian Artillery Regiment: & Juno was his first combat assignment. As he & others attempted the landing, he was machine-gunned & hit 6 times: one shot took off one of his fingers, four hit him in the leg, & one hit him in the chest: lucky for him: a silver cigarette case stopped the bullet: & they say smoking can kill you: not this time. In the show, one of his favourite expressions was: 'the right tool for the right job'.

A tool helps someone accomplish a task: & the more precise the tool & the better its quality, the better for doing the job: all the while keeping in mind that for some, the task may not get done effectively or at all, even with the right tool: the tool is only as good as the person using it: & the person advising the person using it. Some advice & coaching or mentoring may be required, not only for getting the work done, but also for safety, sometimes; shortening time-lines; avoiding common mistakes: (it is usually good to heed the advice of someone who has 'been there & done that'), sometimes for years: they get the job done quickly and make it look easy: training & practice.

Many have been watching the winter Olympics: where seconds & millimeters can mean the difference between a medal level or being on the podium at all. Even the worst performer at the games has already accomplished something that most of us will never accomplish: training hard, under a coach's watchful eye for many long days & years (after 1st having been noted & picked as someone with potential for a particular job or sport), & having the privilege and honour of being

chosen in the first place to be part of a country's team. It's a long way to gold: & even gold: defending champs are being de-throned.

The 17th century French poet, Jean de La Fontaine reminds us that any 'arriving' comes late (over time) & lasts a very short time. The hero to zero thing: lest any of us should boast. The precise reason we should treat everyone with dignity & respect: the high & mighty can fall; the lowly can be raised to power & importance: quickly: think of the societal attitude then & now to 'born in a stable'.

The journey to learn what we have to know, say, do begins with a body of knowledge and practice that we have been led or voluntold to pursue: we begin to learn new facts, new ways of thinking, speaking, moving, interpreting, interacting; we study, practice, & review: with the goal of incorporating it deeply into our very minds & life, so that it becomes long-lasting & automatic: not 'learning it for the test & then forgetting': was this worth learning in the first place? The last stage is the level of professional mastery, where we display all of the above, but also have 'made it ours'.

Our way of doing a job or demonstrating our training, is uniquely ours: two people doing the same job, will do it differently: this is what makes us & our jobs & missions so interesting: & a real opportunity to learn & grow, if we are open to the possibilities: this is my way: what is your way? With the exception of Jesus, there is no 'only way'. This means that if we are open to many experiences & coaches & are keen observers of others & engage others in meaningful conversation, the sky is the limit for the job or mission, or organization; & for us.

But coaches working with humans face challenges, as do the humans themselves: the experience being shared is there, the direction is there, the road is before us, but we don't get there without obstacles (mostly of our own making); & plateaus, & self-doubt: that little sub-conscious voice that can keep us safe, but can also deprive us of success: like they say 'you can't steal 2nd base if you never leave 1st'.

Our stubborn sense of self-sufficiency & independence can be a good thing: but sometimes it blocks from us the advice, answers, & shortcuts we are looking for; & it can block from us the very people who have been trying to give us advice & answers: including God: 'I stand at the door & knock...': sometimes it takes way too long to 'answer the door' & be coachable.

The prophet Jeremiah was attempting to break through to the people of Judah. He was very concerned about their living 'away from God': worshipping gods other than the Lord: not just an 'old testament' problem! God had already laid it all out: His training plan of faith, as it were: God had picked & trained the coaches: God's only agenda with laws/commandments was & is the close to Him faith/love journey & training of His people. Our passage from Jeremiah today reminds everyone that we are at our best when we **are** closest to our Lord & trust Him completely with this day of our lives & every day of our lives: we are in training every day: we are offerings, every day: we are meant to grow: read again:

In Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians: the end of chapter 10 > verse 1 of chapter 11: he gives excellent advice to how the Corinthians & we should be carrying out our missions & daily tasks: advice which is sadly, lacking in so many areas of service in our world: replaced with me, me, me; systemic robotic behavior, money, prestige; doing the exact job I'm under contract to do & nothing more: even in some community service, pastoral type jobs: jobs which are bigger & more spiritually important than a job description or contract & require 'pro-activity'. Sadly, in our drive or resignation to perform to the letter of the law; our systemic drive to encourage people to take that first step themselves, (even when they can't), has led to isolation, hopelessness, overwhelm, death, suicide, and worsening mental & physical health), for more people than we sometimes care to admit. Our Lord Jesus wasn't above questioning the law & practices of the day & the people who were so eager to defend them: frequently to the point of ridiculousness: scholars even developed a name for it: 'building a fence around the Torah': the law of Moses: the first five books of our Bible: setting up rules & routines so that people wouldn't even come close to 'breaking the law of God': if the rules stop you at circle 5, you won't ever get close to penetrating circle 1 & breaking the law. Fences & rings of security around the Torah. Consider our Lord's ancestor David taking bread from the holy of holies, to feed others. The Law is to keep us safe & growing in our relationship with God. God initiated all this: for us.

The Law isn't supposed to be a sacred entity unto & for itself.

Paul advises, do all to the glory of God; do whatever you do with love, empathy, compassion: for God: give no offense to Jews, Greeks, or the church; I am not seeking my own advantage, but that of many: that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. This isn't about us, as individuals: like it's not

about the hammer, screwdriver, or saw, or law: but the mission, the project, the big picture. Imagine doing whatever we do, in a pastoral way: 'as for the Lord', before & instead of 'what's in it for me?' Ironically, the more we do things this way, the more there is in it for us, for we are contributing to God's glory & kingdom, & plan for us: remember, God our creator & coach, has something unique in mind for each of us to do or continue doing & growing in. I have seen actual signs saying 'do everything as if for the Lord', in businesses in this area: so nice to see & do business with.

Project for the week: pray about & reflect on how our world would change if individuals, professionals, politicians, businesses were more pastoral & pro-active: doing everything for the glory of God?

From Mark, we see Jesus, the master (master mentor, master coach) doing just that:

& a leper came to him (we can safely substitute pretty much any affliction, quirk, so-called abnormality here): leprosy was a dreaded disease that couldn't be explained, therefore it & its sufferers were shunned & feared: & lepers were 'ceremonially unclean': priests of the day would have steered clear, lest they themselves became ceremonially unclean: that was to them, the priority: the man's suffering meant little, if anything at all. This man touched Jesus! & said, 'if you will, I can be healed'. Lepers didn't go near people, let alone touch them, for fear of giving them the disease (we know more about transmission now). This man who wasn't welcome in the city or anywhere near a priest. Who do we distance ourselves from? & why? Do we form our opinions from prayer, scripture, & fellowship, or from the media?

'Jesus, moved with compassion, reached out-touched him-& said: 'I am willing: be cleansed': & he was cleansed immediately: Jesus, according to His will, can make all things new: faith is built on having faith, being joyful & thankful when the cure or the prayer answer is now; not yet; or not ever. In God's plan of training & salvation, things may not appear logical or understandable: Noah built an arc in the middle of nowhere (imagine the comments), Mary had her young life turned upside down, yet said: 'I am the Lord's servant'; & as we approach Easter, we think that God's plan for Jesus (for a part of Himself: Father, Son): torture,

humiliation, painful death: wasn't the stuff of tranquil nights: but Jesus too was trained & tested: & trained others in the ways of the Father & the kingdom too.

The plan of Jesus to keep this quiet didn't happen: 'see that you say nothing to anyone': he didn't gather a crowd or contact the Jerusalem Tribune, before healing him. But the man followed one thing Jesus said: 'show yourself to the priest' to be re-instated as 'clean': but he couldn't contain himself & Jesus was besieged by people seeking healing: so much so that 'He could no longer enter the city': the road to the cross is shorter from here.

We may know or suspect what God wants us to do; we may be doing it now or not yet: but we are all receiving training from God from the people & events in our life & from that 'still small voice' which leads & calls. God is the potter, it is said.

Our first joyful duty is to surrender to God & His leading: to see people & events as part of our pastoral training & not as annoying flukes that can't possibly have a purpose. What kingdom 'sport' has God recruited you & me for? How is our training going?

Surrender to God, Surrender to Jesus & be trained & cleansed & prepared to be the right person for the right & unique job that is prepared for each of us: I go to prepare a place, not only on earth, but in heaven: for you.

Amen.