

The following letter was printed in the newsletter of a large congregation:

*Dear Fellow Member,*

<i>Our church membership -</i>	2400
<i>Nonresident members -</i>	150
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>2250</b>
<i>Elderly who have done their share -</i>	50
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>2200</b>
<i>Sick and Shut-ins -</i>	50
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>2150</b>
<i>Members who do not give -</i>	700
<i>Christmas &amp; Easter members -</i>	600
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>1450</b>
<i>Members who are overworked -</i>	600
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>825</b>
<i>Members with excuses -</i>	400
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>425</b>
<i>Members too busy with other things -</i>	245
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>180</b>
<i>Members who have commitments to other organizations -</i>	178
<b><i>Balance left to do the work -</i></b>	<b>2</b>

*That leaves just you and me, my friend, and you had better get busy because it's too much for me to do alone.*

Belonging to a congregation is a privilege. And being a follower of Jesus is also a privilege. But with that privilege come responsibilities and assignments. Because, as Christians, we have a mission. We are on a mission. The very word, “*mission*” means “*to be sent.*”

What does it really mean, to be a Christian. Let me suggest to you that we are not here because we are searching for meaning in life. We are not here because we are studying religion and Christianity seems to make the most sense. We are here because we have received “*a call*” to follow Jesus. And to be called by Jesus, means we have been given “*a mission.*”

Now, there are some people who cannot participate in the life of a congregation because of physical problems or other factors and reasons. But those who can be involved in their church . . . should be. Whether it's singing, praise and worship . . . whether it's the prayers and support, the fellowship and sharing, the servant opportunities and the teaching of God's word . . . whatever it is that is part of our mission . . . these experiences are precisely what we need for our lives.

Every one of us needs that encouragement and that motivation in our own walk of faith . . . not every other Sunday, not once a month, but each and every weekend! We have a “*mission!*” And we need constant encouragement in that mission, because it is very easy to become discouraged!

Recently, I was in a discussion with a young college student at ISU who was telling me that he was “religious” but that he didn’t believe in “organized religion.” My first response was to not to worry, because we were really not as organized as he might think!.

But on a more serious note, our understanding of the church, which is another name for organized religion, is that the church is here to help the mission along . . . to do a better job with the mission . . . to organize the scope the the details of the mission.

You see, Christian discipleship has a lot less to do with WHAT WE BELIEVE and much more to do with WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY DOING. Being on a mission, means that our responsibility is to have less discussion and more action. My experience after 38 years in the ministry is that most congregations are made up of just two kinds of people, no matter how you and I view it . . . The ones who just talk about what should be done, and those who get busy and do it!

### **In our Gospel today, Jesus focuses on the doers, not the talkers!**

In the first portion of the Gospel in Chapter 9, Jesus looks over the work that lies ahead of him. He contemplates his vision of the future. He sees great multitudes of people who are in need and hurting. And then he turns to his disciples and empowers them to do the very same things that he has been doing in his ministry . . . “*As you go, proclaim the Good News (Gospel), ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.*” (Matthew 10:7)

That’s how you proclaim the Gospel – you do something! And you do it in the name of Jesus!

- In one sense, it is difficult to believe that Jesus could ever be overwhelmed, but in this regard, Jesus is no different that we are . . . as he looks around and looks at the people, the needs of the world are unbelievable! There are so many who are lost . . . like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus says: “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few: therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*” (Matthew 9:37-38)
- In another sense, it is also difficult to believe that Jesus would turn to his disciples to fulfill his mission. Think about it. They are rookies. They do not understand Jesus. They screw things up. They are fraught with inconsistencies and problems. How could he think of entrusting his mission to them!

- And then what about us . . . to those of us who seek to follow him . . . how unwise to entrust this task to us . . . with our lack of ability, our lack of motivation and our obvious lack of commitment.

But that is exactly what Jesus does. And when you think about it, that is what our mission is really all about – to do the things Jesus wants us to do, not by our own power, but by His power.

In the Gospel we see that Jesus actually gives each of us the very same power that motivated and enabled him to do his ministry! You see, up to this point in his ministry, Jesus has done everything! Jesus has driven the car and the disciples have been the passengers. He has made all the decisions, handled the difficult moments and charted the course through the various towns and villages they have gone to. Jesus has taken the criticism and has been able to maintain his leadership!

But now, he turns to his disciples. He commissions them. He calls them and sends them out to do the work, and he gives them instructions. He tells them that this is not going to be easy stuff. They may be shunned and ignored. They may even be hated and ostracized. Even within their families, they will have problems. But this is no different from what will happen to Him. And it is the mission . . . to proclaim the Good News in word and in deed. *“The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” (Matthew 10:7)*

Derek Redmond was a British runner who had prepared for the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea. But he suffered a terrible injury. It was so bad that it led to 22 subsequent surgeries. But Derek had trained his whole life for the Olympics, and he was determined not to let these injuries keep him from pursuing his personal dream.

To the sheer surprise of many . . . four years later, Derek qualified for the 400 meter race in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. He was ecstatic and the adrenaline was flowing as the time for the race was at hand.

As the race started, Derek began with a very strong start. But less than half-way through, he ripped a hamstring muscle and fell to the ground in agony. He was stunned, shocked and devastated. While the rest of the runners moved past him, Derek managed to get to his feet and began struggling to move forward.

Then something caught the attention of the television cameras. An older man wearing blue shorts and a *Nike Just Do It* cap pushed past a security guard onto the race track. It was Derek's father, Jim. He put his arm around his son and he held him as they crossed the finish line together. As he finished the race, the crowd erupted into thunderous applause; it has become a classic moment in sports history.

After years of waking up at 4:00 a.m. to help his son pursue his dream, his father had one thing to say to his son, *“Derek, we've started this thing together and we're going to finish this thing together.”*

This powerful story challenges us, as it challenges all fathers, to do whatever we can, to help our children finish the race, particularly when they stumble and fall along the way.

But this story, for me, is also a reminder of our Heavenly Father . . . a God, who will never let us down . . . who will always pick us up . . . who remains at our side through whatever crisis or difficulty we face . . . who promises unconditional love and support . . . and who will be with us always . . . a God who sends us out on a mission to proclaim the Good News.

Listen to the words from the prophet Isaiah, God says: *Listen to me . . . you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you.*" (Isaiah 46:3-4)

What else do we need to know! So let's get to work. Let's get on with the mission . . . whether you're 22 years old or 92! Jesus has given us the mission. But most importantly, He has given us his unqualified and unconditional support.

What are you going to do! Amen!