

He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...”

Last week I asked the question that if you had a retirement account would you buy stock in the Christian church and put it in that account.

I don't know how you think I answered that question but I don't think I did a very good job of answering it. With your patience and indulgence I would like another stab at answering that question.

As a person of faith – as I think most of you are – I believe in God – and I believe that at the end of the day – whatever and whenever that might be – God will be in control of His Universe. But with that as a given the church is still a human organization and as such it will have its ups and downs just as General Motors will have its ups and downs.

But the church is an organization chartered by God. It has purposes and missions given to us by God as we are the church. The church is not this building or our organizational structure or the hymnals and prayer books – even as they are important in doing the things God has chartered and challenged us to do. We who sit here this morning plus those on the roll who may be out golfing this morning or on vacation are the church at St. Luke's

On a vacation in London with a friend– you're probably saying to yourself : he's always on vacation – did he ever work? – we visited St. Margaret's Church. If ever there were a church loaded with Anglican tradition, stained glass windows. A beautiful organ, candles, vestments, Incense, great choir, wonderful homily by the priest, this church had it.

But this was also money Sunday – you know, the last day of the annual stewardship campaign – the time that someone talks about that dreaded subject, “Money.”

I read the letter that had been given to every member.

In some ways this visit was one of the most interesting things about that trip. Because it gave me an insight to how does the church or rather an ordinary church in England make it? How do churches in ordinary neighborhoods, with ordinary people as members survive and keep their doors open? We had been to Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, Canterbury Cathedral and knew how they kept their doors open. (Short answer: Our admittance tickets to see the places)

For St. Margaret's it was a struggle as it is in all places. The letter discussed its membership. There is a lot of turnover as its members would change jobs or be transferred. It sounded like the characteristics of a population that would live in a large city – and a very expensive city to live in. A beautiful church – yet one not particularly old or historic as such things go in England. Unsaid in the letter was anything about the “competition.” London is an interesting and a fast paced city with many things going on all the time. In a sense all these things going on would be “competition” for the time that one

would spend in church or church related activities. Who was it who said, “when a man is tired of of London, he is tired of life.” [Samuel Johnson]

What are some things we can say about our own general population with which someone might be trying to share the good news?

Our country has become increasingly diverse – including religiously. Earlier in our history most people were Christian. If you’ve read American literature from an earlier day you might notice almost a built-in presumption that everyone was Christian. I hope I’m not letting the cat out of the bag about my personal TV preferences when I say if you watch a Roy Rogers or Lone Ranger re-run there is also an unstated presumption that certain things are wrong and certain things are right – and this “code” has been strongly influenced by Christian ethics, I don’t have a problem with this – indeed, I’m strongly in favor of it. Young people growing up need to know there is a “right and wrong” – and need to learn it from a young age.

But I think increasingly we cannot assume a person is a Christian or would wish to become a Christian.

We are a much more urban population – most often living in cities.

There is less a regional feeling. People do not feel as strongly as in past years that they are a Southerner, for example.

Although some disagree about the degree I suspect many people are less aware of the role of the church over time has had in history and its importance. Families are smaller and there is less involvement with family. We are a very mobile population. When a person lives in Atlanta and his family is in Arkansas there is going to be less contact – and less closeness.

What reasons cause a person to think about becoming a member of a church .

There was a time when I did not go to church.

While I grew up and was baptized in the Methodist church I had been absent for many, many years. Actually decades. I was living in Kansas at the time. I had moved because of my job.

One morning, one Sunday morning, I woke up and decided to go to church this morning. Hadn’t stepped into one for years.

I had not been watching a TV evangelist. Someone preaching on a street corner had not cornered me and “saved” me.

I don’t know why I did what I did that Sunday morning. I remember sort of putting conditions on it, though. I said I’m not going to a church where they talk you doing all this

work. And I want it to be a church with good music, beautiful music. I suspect God laughed at the first. And in the second – I have been greatly blessed – especially here at St. Luke's.

I didn't mean to dwell on my personal story so much. It does have something to do with "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

So why go to church? Why does someone visit a church? In my case there was no great problem in my life. At the time things were going ok for me. I liked my job, my boss liked my work, I was enjoying living in a different part of the country. Yet there was something missing. I'm probably making this sound more dramatic than it was. I think I was interested in the answers to some of the big questions of life.

And I think in the years that I was there in that church....

No, let me back up.

To be honest I don't think that in my years there that there was ever a Sunday morning in which the Preacher came out and said,

BAM! FOLKS THIS IS IT! THIS IS THE SUNDAY MORNING THAT WE ARE GOING TO TELL YOU THE ANSWERS TO THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE !!!!!

It wasn't like that at all.

Most Sunday mornings Dean Robert Shahan would bring his message, his homily. He was in the pulpit and he was wearing his vestments yet it like he was just talking to you. Almost like he was talking to me personally.

But if you listened he was talking about serious things, important things. Yet in a way that was understandable and made sense.

And there were other opportunities there to learn, to deepen – if you will pardon the expression – to deepen one's spirituality. He taught – no he talked – at an adult forum – class – we would go through and read some book of the New Testament – and we really learned.

I don't know how it happened – I certainly wasn't pushed – but I got involved in something called Education for Ministry. It's a four year course. Several of you here at St. Luke's have been involved in it. Over the four years it's a compact refresher – or introduction – to the Old and New Testament. Then it talks about the church – and about the Anglican communion of which we are a part. And then it talks about where we fit in all of this –

So I guess in a sense over time almost without realizing it I think I gained a better understanding to what might be called some of the big questions of life. I gained a deeper appreciation of the Christian faith and its importance and contributions to human life – and my own life.

And almost imperceptibly I found that I had become part of a family.

In many ways I had moved to that town as a complete stranger. I knew a few people at work. I had met some people. Yet I was a stranger. I was alone. I had no family – at least close enough to make a difference. I had no friends – at least close enough to make a difference.

And yet after spending time and participating I had found I had become part of a family.

I've sort of meandered this morning – probably to try up the clear up in my mind as much as anything some of the thoughts I've had about our readings and what they are saying to us – particularly this morning as we hear Christ' injunction that “the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.”

Several afternoons ago some of us in the church were meeting – talking about how we can better co-ordinate our visits to those of our church family whose health or age prevent them from attending church regularly or other situations in which it may be good for someone in our church family to make a call.

One person there related of the afternoon her mother passed away. In such situations there is a lot to be done and more people than you might think to be dealt with. She was handling things as best she could – and everything was being taken care of. Then she thought of a detail requiring her to make a quick trip to her own home. She went quickly and returned quickly to her mother's home. When she returned two of her good friends from St. Luke's were there. They were just there to be there for her. When she saw them she realized how much she needed them, how much just their being there meant to her. They were family for her in a special way.

I have talked more that I should have about what might be trends and challenges in the years to come. Maybe one of the greatest challenges – and maybe the greatest joy – is that of just being a member of this family – this family of St. Luke's. Whatever happens, whenever it happens there will be a member of family who will be there for us. And one of our greatest opportunities – our greatest joy – will be for us when we are there for someone of our family we love.

And as to the question that started this, I would hold General Motors and definitely go with God!

And in love and joy bear one another's burdens.

Amen.

Richard Robertson

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