

Qualifications For Service

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Mark 1:14-20

Service of Confirmation

8th January 2012

People who work in the human relations departments of their companies must enjoy reading some of the resumes that are sent to them by job-seekers. Here are some of the quotations that must have brought a smile to interviewers as they read through applications submitted to them.

- “I have a bachelorette degree in computers.”
- “I graduated in the top 66% of my class.”
- “Married, eight children. Prefer frequent travel.”
- “Experience: Watered, groomed, and fed the family dog for years.”
- “Reason for leaving last job: The owner gave new meaning to the word ‘paranoia.’ I prefer to elaborate privately.”
- “I am a rabid typist. I type 25 words per minute.”
- “Strengths: Ability to meet deadlines while maintaining composer.”
- “Once focused on an objective, I believe myself to have an undying lust for success with accuracy and efficiency.”
- “Thank you for your consideration. Hope to hear from you shortly!”
- “It’s best for employers that I not work with people.”
- “Here are my qualifications for you to overlook.”
- “I realize that my total lack of appropriate experience may concern those considering me for employment.”
- “I’ll starve without a job but don’t feel you have to give me one.”¹

Anyone looking for a job these days, knows how important it is to write a good resume and cover letter – without making some of the booboos just listed that will swiftly ensure that you are de-listed. Yes, no matter what job we may be applying for, a good presentation of our qualifications counts for everything.

Considering what is necessary in today’s job market, it’s very surprising, therefore, to find that, 2,000 years ago, when Jesus was choosing new recruits for the greatest job of all time, when he was looking for disciples to take his message of love and peace to the world, that that was the one thing he did not ask of his prospective followers. Their qualifications. He didn’t seem to try and find out whether or not they had the right stuff. Whether they were suited to the tough task ahead. As one writer on this passage says, “We might think Matthew would have mentioned that Jesus chose these individuals because of their prior experience, or their great potential or their unusual spiritual insight. But we are told none of that ... We are only given their names and that’s all.”² So, unless Jesus had done secret background checks on his prospective disciples, their

qualifications did not seem to count for anything. Doesn’t that seem strange?

Some people might say, of course, that Jesus should have been a little bit more careful in his choice of followers. After all, wasn’t this somewhat nondescript group of fishermen, tax collectors and artisans, in many ways, just an unruly rabble of ne’er-do-wells, a bunch of losers? They were always arguing among themselves, squabbling over which of them was the most important³, constantly making dumb decisions,⁴ turning away little children⁵ and rebuffing those who wanted to see Jesus⁶ and work with him.⁷ Not only that, these so-called disciples fell asleep on the job more than once.⁸ And, worst of all, when Jesus’ enemies came to get him, when he needed his friends more than ever, they betrayed him,⁹ they denied him,¹⁰ and “left him and ran away”¹¹ into the darkness like a bunch of scared rabbits.

A minister was talking to a group of Sunday School children one day about how the disciples Jesus chose turned out to be a rather questionable assortment of characters. Peter was so hot-headed, always running off at the mouth. Matthew was a tax-collector, a collaborator with the Roman army. Worst of all, Judas sold Jesus down the river for a paltry 30 pieces of silver. “What does that tell you about his followers?” the minister asked the group. The kids sat there in numbed silence for some time. Blank look on their faces. Then one of the young boys spoke up. “I don’t know what it tells us about his followers but it sure shows that Jesus was a lousy judge of character.”¹²

Well, maybe he was. But, then again, maybe Jesus chose these people exactly because they were who they were. Because they were not special in any way. Because they had no particular qualifications. Because they were a rough-and-ready bunch. Maybe, as one writer suggests, because he knew just how difficult his mission was going to be, Jesus was wiser “than to choose pure, pious, ‘spiritual’ people. [Instead] he chose everyday, tough, realistic, ordinary people because the task he sent them out to perform was so extraordinary.”¹³

So Jesus took a risk with a motley crew of unlikely individuals. A risk that certainly paid off when you look at what these disciples achieved despite all their faults and failings! They boldly went among their enemies teaching about Jesus. They stood up in the marketplace, fearlessly telling what his death and resurrection meant.¹⁴ They healed the sick and they cured the diseased.¹⁵ They showed how important it was to share with the needy.¹⁶ Most of all, they ushered in God’s kingdom; a kingdom of love and peace and justice; a kingdom that has lasted to this very day. When you think about it, we would not

be sitting here today if these disciples, these oh-ordinary individuals, had not been so extraordinarily successful in their unexceptional, unremarkable, down-to-earth way.

Now, all of this, strangely enough, gives hope to those of us who are called to be Jesus' disciples today. As we look at ourselves, we wonder what Jesus would want with us. Why he would call us to be followers. We have no special qualifications for Christian service. We are ordinary, everyday people, not particularly religious perhaps, rough around the edges, full of faults and failings. Like Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, we know every excuse in the book why we should not do what is asked of us. "I am too young," as he pleaded, "I am just a child. I don't know how to speak."¹⁷ And maybe we would add, "I'm too old. Or, I don't have enough energy. Or, I'm too busy. Or, there are others much better suited to Christian service than me."

Yet, despite our feelings of unworthiness, despite our protestations of inexperience and lack of qualification, still Jesus keeps laying his hand on our shoulder and saying, "Follow me!" Why does he do this? Why does he keep coming after us? Why is he so persistent when we keep trying to put him off? I wonder if it's because he sees something in us that we don't see ourselves. Maybe he realises we have greater potential than we think we have. Maybe, ordinary people though we may be, he sees those gifts within us that he knows he can use to serve him in the church, in our homes, in our school, in our working life, in our world. Wherever.

I wonder if you remember that delightful film of a few years back, *Notting Hill*. Set in London, England, it is a beautifully tender and very funny romance in which world-famous film super-star, Anna Scott (played by Julia Roberts) happens to venture into a shabby, old travel bookstore owned by shy, retiring, stuttering William Thacker (played by Hugh Grant). It's a most unlikely meeting between two people from completely different worlds but, strangely, from the outset, there seems to be a genuine attraction. As the story progresses, they keep meeting, sometimes by accident, sometimes by design, but the reasons for Anna Scott not wanting to have anything to do with William Thacker pile up relentlessly. There is the outrageously vulgar Welsh man with whom Thacker shares an apartment. Then there's Thacker's off-the-wall sister with the zany hairdo. Not to mention his "loser" friends who sit around trying to outdo each other in deciding who is the biggest failure in life. Not to speak of all the blunders and bungles caused by Thacker's uncertain and insecure personality. But still Anna is drawn back to him. Time and time again. Why? Because despite his faults and failings, she recognises in him qualities of heart and soul she needs but cannot find in the world of superstardom she inhabits.¹⁸

In something of the same way, Jesus constantly comes back to us, constantly pursues us, because he sees

in us qualities he needs; experiences that he can use; attributes of heart and mind and soul that we don't appreciate ourselves but which are precious to him. He constantly comes back and calls us to follow him because he sees us, not for what we have done, but for what he thinks we can do in the future. He is not so concerned with our past credentials as with our future possibilities.

Whether, today, you confirm your discipleship as new church members, or whether you have been members of the church for a long while, don't forget it's not your qualifications for service that are important. What really counts is that Christ wants you and only you. Because he believes in you and sees great potential in you for Christian service.

So, don't be afraid. Respond to his call with confidence and know that whatever he wants of you, he will give you the strength to do it. Whatever challenge he summons you to undertake on his behalf, he will give you the courage to rise, embrace it and accomplish it.

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¹ Resume quotations,

<http://www.rinkworks.com/said/resume.shtml>

² William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, [Vol.27, No.2, Year A], p.48-49

³ Mark 9:33ff

⁴ Mark 9:18

⁵ Mark 10:13-16

⁶ Mark 10:13ff

⁷ Mark 9:38ff

⁸ Mark 9:2ff; Mark 14:37

⁹ Luke 22:47 ff.

¹⁰ Luke 22:54 ff.

¹¹ Matthew 25:56

¹² William H. Willimon, *Op. Cit.*, p.50

¹³ *Ibid*, p.49

¹⁴ Acts 3:11ff

¹⁵ Acts 3:1ff

¹⁶ Acts 2:42ff

¹⁷ Jeremiah 1:6

¹⁸ Julia Roberts, Hugh Grant, *Notting Hill*, Director: Roger Michell; Writer: Richard Curtis, Universal Pictures, 1999