

“Here am I, Lord, use me.”

“Come to me , all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28.
“Here I am.” I Samuel 3:16.

Between the reality and the ideal; the intention and the action; the plan and the execution lay our human, anxiety, sweat and tears as we seek to live out our existence in a world where things are constantly in flux. It encompassed the internal struggles we experience as imperfect creatures of a perfect creator God. Paul found it difficult to discipline his body to do what his mind and heart knew were the right things to do. And Jesus found the crowd to be unresponsive to his call for each of them to find rest for their souls. In the midst of all of this, how can we find rest for our souls? How can we respond to Jesus’s call to take his easy yoke upon our shoulders and follow him? Can we say *“Here am I Lord, use me?”*

I received a letter this past week from a 13 years old girl who is a member of St. Barnabas’ parish. She wrote: *“Thank you so very much for helping in at St. Barnabas’ church. I so enjoy your sermons.”* Then she said, *“Perhaps you have seen the enclosed. My sister, Sarah, sent me this article. Amy (our secretary enlarged it.) I thought you might enjoy reading it.”* She then went on to share excerpts from a sermon given by a boy scout named Samuel Thomsen who lived near Little Sioux, Iowa and attended Southwest Church of Christ. After Sam Thomsen had participated in a leadership conference in Kansas City, MO, he wrote and delivered a sermon to his church entitled, *“Here Am I!”* More about Sam later.

I. We piped but you would not dance. Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.

In today’s gospel, Jesus compared some among the crowd that came out to hear him to children playing in the marketplace. They were saying, *“We have played the flute for you but you would not dance. We wailed but you would not moan.”* To the crowd Jesus said, *“You have said that John the Baptist who came fasting and abstaining from strong drinks was crazy. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you called him a glutton and a friend to [known] sinners.”* Matthew 11:17, 19. In that crowd there were three basic groups of leaders. The pharisee basically who agreed with Jesus’ cosmology and philosophy but were against him because he did not observe all of the pharisaic laws. The Sadducees who felt that Jesus might undermine their favorable position with the Roman government. And, the Zealots who were not happy with Jesus because his revolution rhetoric didn’t go far enough. Each group played its flute but Jesus did not dance to their tunes. They wailed at him but he did not moan. They were saying, we know where this man came from, but where did he get all of these ideas of his? He can’t be for real because he does not follow our particular understanding of the truth.

Jesus responded with a prayer to his Father. He thanked God that truths hidden from the so called wise were being revealed to the those like babes among the crowds that came out to hear him. He stated that what they must come to understand was that for God, he was the Way, the Truth and the Life for all. Everything related to salvation, success and

happiness was in his hand from the Father. He alone knew the Father and the Father knew him as his faithful and beloved Son. And the most important thing was his divine origin and personal teachings about the way to abundant life here and in the age to come. If they would only listen and follow him!

Jesus then extended an invitation to that crowd of mixed attendees. *“Come unto me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:28-29. The question was and still is who will respond to him and who will go out to serve for him? The many voices from the crowds today still call out to us with mixed messages and many expectations. Whom will we listen to and follow?

II. I Am Not in Control of My own Body. (Romans 7:15-25a)

When I was headmaster of Christ Church School in Forrest City, Arkansas, I had a second grade teacher who would always admonish her misbehaving students by saying, *“Now, Johnny, you know better than that!”* One day upon taking her aside I said to her, *“Mrs. Warren, it is not that Johnny doesn’t know any better. He either doesn’t want to or can not do any better.”* There is often a wide gap between the knowledge and the action. The drug addict has to know from observation that the drugs he is using are destructive to his body and his family. The thief has to know that his stealing is destructive to his community. And, there are those who while mouthing all kind of moral platitudes are committing the very same acts for which they condemn other. Then when they are caught, if they are caught, they either deny it or they want sympathy for that which they were not willing to extend it to others. Each of them, whether deliberately or unwittingly cannot seem to be his or her own savior. And the truth is, they cannot!

Paul recognized this struggle within himself in today’s epistle, naming it and raising the question, *“Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?”* Romans 7:25. Paul came to the conclusion that only the indwelling Spirit could liberate or help him with his thorn in the flesh. He said, *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.”* Romans 8:2. Knowing that he was free through the spirit of Christ, Paul still realized how hard it was to do the right thing. He, therefore, concluded that like an athlete preparing for a great race, one has to discipline oneself through some rule or routine of life patterned after the life of Christ. That too is why the church has set aside many aids toward sanctification: having a rule of life, selecting a spiritual director, practicing regular prayer, bible reading and frequent routines of personal devotions and public worship. Between the reality and the ideal, we need a rule of life. (Reference “To Catch a Predator” or “Cheater” on TV)

III. A Boy Scout Named Sam

But between the reality and the ideal; the intention and the action and between the plan and the execution, we need one thing more! I think that Samuel Thomsen captured it well in his sermon to Southwest Church of Christ. So with Judy Skinker’s permission, I will

end with excerpts.

“Do you ever like giving bad news. I sure don’t.” He then shared the story of the call of Samuel to the priesthood in the Hebrew scriptures. There, Samuel responded to God by saying, *“Here am I.”* He also agreed to tell Eli what God had said. Sam Thomsen continues, *“That took guts to tell the priest who turned a blind eye to what his sons were doing.”* But *“the message is not about the guts that Samuel had but about the way he said, ‘Here am I’ throughout his life.”* Then Samuel Thomsen told about a mission trip into the inner city that his church group went on. *“We met with an organization called Angels on Wheels. They go to poor neighborhoods where crime and drugs are practically everywhere and talk and pray with the people on the streets. They do that every Friday night. I don’t know about you, but if I did that not just once but every Friday night, I would have a lot better attitude toward everything. In a way that is how you can say, ‘Here am I, Lord, USE ME.”* The article reported that young Sam did volunteered to do it every Friday night when he could have been doing something else.

Sam continued, *“Even in most difficult times, let’s try to be like Samuel and say, ‘Here am I, Lord, use me.’ If you just come to church, stand up, sit down, listen to the sermon, and you don’t do anything else throughout the week, God’s not going to use you. It’s people with faith that he’s going to use, that pray and listen for what God’s trying to tell them. God loves you, and he showed that on the cross, but you can show that love back by doing his will. You can listen for God and say, ‘Here am I, send me.’ You may think that he’s not going to hear your prayers, well, let me tell you, if you think that, you’re sadly mistaken. Maybe you think that he won’t talk to you, it might take time, but he will. It could be a service opportunity, a job, giving money to the poor, or standing up for what is right. But when the time comes, say, ‘Here am I, Lord, use me.”*

Well, the rest of the story shared by Judy tells us that this Samuel was a very special young man who was adopted and given the Christian name of Samuel Zachary Jordan Thomsen. The sad news was that Samuel was killed shortly afterwards in a tornado near Little Sioux, Iowa. The good news was that he not only said, *‘Here am I, Lord, use me,’* he impressed 13 years old Judy Skinker of this congregation. Through her, we share this story, her letter, her witness and her concern with you this morning. (See *Omaha.com*).

Paul realized that there is a wide gap between the desire to do the right thing and doing it. Jesus realized how hard it was too that is why he said, *“Come unto me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:30.

Between the reality and the ideal; the intention and the action and the plan and the execution lay human, anxiety, sweat and tears as we seek to live out our existence in a world where things are constantly in flux. In the midst of all of this, will we seek to find rest for our souls in Jesus Christ? Will we respond to Jesus’s call and take his easy yoke upon our shoulders and follow him? Can we say, *“Here am I Lord, use me?”* Samuel Thomsen did.

Let us pray.

O God who sent your Son Jesus to show us the way to abundant life: teach us to cast all of our care upon you; to trust that our beginning, middle and end all rest in you; and to be

confident that you are with us in the midst of life's many storms. Then, Lord, inspire and strengthen us to witness to your presence in some small way that will make the world a better place in which to live for all. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.