

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
Thy Will be Done: Teamwork
The Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Exodus 4:27-31; Luke 10:1-3

I thought I knew everything about cars. I thought I knew everything about cars because at the age of 16 I quit playing sports, got a job, and spent every dime I made on my 56' Chevy. Along the way I learned how to rebuild engines, replace transmissions, shifters, differentials, brakes, carburetors, fuel pumps, and just about every piece of a car that could be replaced. It was an education that has proven useful across the years. Like I said, I thought that experience meant I knew a lot about cars, and it all seemed pretty simple. Then I moved to Detroit. Putting it mildly, what I learned was that I really knew very little not only about cars but about the complex nature of taking a car from a concept to reality to getting it out of the dealership. I had no idea about the process of design, the science behind the materials, the coordination of thousands of engineers across multiple disciplines, the coordination and multiplicity of suppliers, many supplying only one part of the car, the importance of micro-chips, the manufacturing plant and its advanced technology and robotics. the dealer networks that sell and service the car; or the financing sector who keeps all of it on budget and helps people purchase new and used cars. I was, and continue to be, impressed by the amount of teamwork that it takes to get a concept to a reality, to the showroom, and then on the road.

In some ways my naivete about cars was also my naivete about the teamwork that has been and still is required in the construction of God's kingdom here on earth. What I mean by that is that my childhood Sunday school lessons made it seem as if the entire Biblical story was about a few heroes who made everything happen and everyone else were just onlookers whose presence was not all that important. These heroes were Freedom Giving Moses, I killed Goliath David, the Savior Jesus, and the Apostle Paul. They were the real movers and shakers. They were never in need of a team. Sure, Jesus had the disciples, but even they were not all that important. Teamwork wasn't necessary for Biblical superheroes. Yet, as any Marvel Movie fan knows, it takes a team to accomplish a task, as both our stories show this morning. First, Moses needed Aaron. Moses was not a capable speaker. He needed someone else to speak the words that God was giving him. Later in Exodus we will discover that Moses will appoint both an unknown number of judges and seventy elders to help him run things. David, though he could slay a giant, needed more people to help him and so he recruited those called his mighty men. Jesus needed a larger team as well. Not only did he need the disciples, but he also needed the seventy to go before as an advance team to prepare the way for him. And the Apostle Paul worked with Barnabas, Timothy and appointed elders everywhere he traveled. Finally, let's not forget the role of women. Moses' wife Zipporah saved his life. David and his men are fed by Abigail when they were hungry. Jesus' ministry was supported by the gifts of women. And Paul had Apostolic co-workers who were women. Biblically speaking, it always takes a team.

The same is true here at Everybody's church. It takes everybody to keep this community running. While those of us on staff are usually the most visible presence, we cannot make First Presbyterian run. It

takes a team. It takes a team of staff behind the scenes to keep things humming. And it takes dozens and dozens of volunteers to keep the church up and running. It takes ushers, and musicians, and singers, and audio-video tech people, and people on the phones, and people serving on committees, and people engaged in mission, and Stephen ministers walking with people through tough times, and Sunday school teachers and helpers, and Gardening Angels to keep the flower beds looking fabulous, and on and on. And then it takes all of us making financial contributions to pay the bills which supports our staff, keeps the lights on, pays for mission work, and then shares resources with the local, national, and global church. I realize that I may sound like one of those smiling people on PBS talking about all the wonderful programming they produce and so why don't you contribute and get a free mug or tote bag? While we do share the need for funding with those wonderful organizations, the difference is in our mission. The mission of PBS and NPR is to educate and entertain. Our mission is to transform: to transform people into the image of Christ, to transform this community into the very body of Christ, and to help transform the world into the Kingdom of God. And the reality is that our church, your church, is only able to do this transformative work when all of us share our talents, time, and treasure. It was true in Jesus' time, as Jesus was supported by the financial gifts of his followers, and it is true today.

In some ways this is an appropriate Sunday to be talking about teamwork because in a few minutes we will be remembering some of the team members who are no longer with us. These men and women who gave of their time, talents, and treasure to help this church become what it is today. They are part of a 187-year tradition that has insured that the work of Kingdom building in Birmingham continues uninterrupted. My challenge to you on this Sunday as we light these candles and then as we come to the table, is to ask yourselves how am I willing to be part of this team that nurtures a community of faith in which all people are embraced continues to be a light to the world?