

## The Message for Sunday, July 25, 2010

**Title:** “Disqualified”

**Scripture:** Colossians 2:6-8; 16-19

**I. Disqualified...** It does not happen often in my profession (as a United Methodist pastor), but there have been a few times I have had a job interview. The one that sticks out the most in my memory is when I was interviewed for Wesley Foundation Director at M.T.S.U.

Most of us have had some kind of job interview. Most of us have had the “fidgets” over what not to do. We know the things that would disqualify us instantly. Some of those things are: Don’t interrupt, don’t bite your fingernails, etc. But, thanks to late night television and to the internet, we now have access to all sorts of stories about slip ups that have disqualified candidates. For example: There was a balding interviewee who excused himself abruptly and returned to the office a few minutes later, wearing a hairpiece. Or, there was the candidate who said that if he were hired, he would demonstrate his loyalty by having the company logo tattooed on his forearm. There was this one guy who interrupted the interview to phone his therapist for advice on how to answer a specific question he was being asked. And finally, (I find this hard to be true, but it is supposed to come from an actual case) there was a guy who pointed to the picture on the interviewer’s desk, and asked “who the lovely babe was.” Upon hearing that it was the interviewer’s wife, he asked if she were home and wanted the number. The interviewer immediately called security. (“Matthew Visits Monster.com,” a sermon on Mark 2:13-22, February 27, 2000, found at [www.homileticonline.com](http://www.homileticonline.com)) These are the types of things that can get you disqualified pretty quickly.

Well, you probably had already figured out that it is better not to do any of these things at a job interview; but, there are plenty of other times in life when we get disqualified. One of the most painful memories of my childhood was being disqualified from playing pee-wee football. It did not have anything to do with my near-sightedness, or my height. It was all about my weight. I guess they thought that anybody who weighed over 100 pounds in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade was heavy enough to put the hurt on some little guy. As it turned out, it only saved me from discovering at an early age that I have very little athletic ability. I would have embarrassed myself long before I would have fallen on some little kid.

When I got to college, I was disqualified from some scholarships because my father made too much. It did not seem to matter to the financial aid office that money was in short supply in my home because my mother spent too much.

When I got ready to be ordained, I was at first disqualified because I kept taking classes in graduate school. I had to quit taking classes so that I would not be listed as a student. At some time in our lives, if not throughout most of our lives, many of us have been disqualified from doing something.

**II. Rejected...** Bill Shapiro has just edited a book entitled, *Other People’s Rejection Letters* (published by Clarkson Potter Publishers, an imprint of Crown Publishing Group, a

division of Random House, 2010) Some of the book is funny, and other parts of it are really painful because we all know what it is like to be rejected because we are disqualified. Consider the letter Bill Dobrow of West Hartford, Connecticut, got from the Marine Corps. It says, “Dear Mr. Dobrow: We appreciate your interest in the Marine Corps. However, since you are twelve, you won’t be eligible to be a Marine for a while.” Major Dave Turner went on to encourage Bill to get his diploma first, and then he could talk to a recruiter about the kind of training opportunities the Marines offer. Interested... but disqualified. (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/27349495/Other-People-s-Rejection-Letters-edited-by-Bill-Shapiro-Excerpt>)

Or, consider the letter artist Andy Warhol got from the Director of Museum Collections at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It is dated, October 18, 1956. Andy Warhol (1928-1987) had sent them a drawing entitled, “Shoe.” They studied it and then rejected it because they did not have much storage and thought it would not get much viewing, anyway. They politely asked that he come retrieve the drawing. (*Ibid.*)

Bill Dobrow, the eager “wanna-be” Marine went on to become a famous rock drummer. And Andy Warhol... well everyone has heard of this leading figure of pop art. With a \$100 million sale of one of his works, he has achieved a status on the level of Pablo Picasso. Unfortunately disqualified....

**III. Paul’s advice...** Writing to the Church at Colossae, Paul said, “Do not let anyone disqualify you...” (Colossians 2:18). I had read this letter many times in the past. But, as often happens when I read scripture, this phrase struck me in a strange and attractive way. I wondered why Paul said it that way.

When I checked the word (καταβραβεύω), I found that it literally means, “to judge as a referee that someone is not worthy to receive a prize.” About being unworthy, Paul warned that some might try to cause a Christian to be disqualified by forcing them to participate in one of a number of questionable practices in worship. Those practices included self-abasement, worshipping angels, becoming obsessed with visions, being conceited, and not holding fast to Christ. Most of these had become very popular in the popular religious expressions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, A. D.—both in Judaism and in religion in general.

Also, we have to remember that the birth of Western Philosophy was in a nearby city in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, B. C. (Miletus). Philosophical thinking had become a kind of religion all its own. In saying what he said, Paul was not condemning intellectual pursuits. He was simply warning against letting that—and all other religious habits—from becoming substitutes for a relationship with Christ.

However, I think one of the most important things he said was letting others disqualify us. For just a few minutes, I want to concentrate on that.

**IV. Questionable...** The first thing I want to say is this. By saying, “Don’t let others disqualify us,” Paul was warning us not to let others push us into accepting and participating in questionable religious practices. The implication is they will tell us we are not Christians if we do not do what they think is necessary in order for us to be religious.

I know you have friends like that. I have had them all of my life. I remember, especially the night on which I discovered that we all do not think alike on matters of worship. I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. At the Monday night meeting of the Boy Scout troop, I made the mistake of asking one young fellow if he was going to the little dance at the Community Center that coming Friday. He apparently thought it was the right time to let me know not only how sinful that was, but also to let me know just how wrong I was by being a Methodist—and we were standing in the basement of the 1<sup>st</sup> Methodist Church!

I guess everyone has a definition of “questionable religious practices.” But, I would like to share with you some of mine. When we were in New Jersey, we saw a religious television program on cable that we do not get around here. The person on the program was offering a small, sealed pouch containing “miracle water.” All I would have had to do would have been to call in, and they would have sent me this little plastic pouch of water. I could then use the water to anoint any number of things in my life where I might be having trouble, including my checkbook.

Others offer prayer cloths, little trinkets or souvenirs, or offer promises of financial reward if you make a pledge of money and then send it in. The problem is not so much that you do these things. The problem is allowing them to substitute for your relationship with Christ. I strongly believe that a little pouch of water can in no way substitute for having a 24/7 relationship with the living Christ.

I wear a gold cross around my neck. My parents drove to Birmingham on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and gave it to me. I have worn it ever since. Prior to that, I wore a gold-toned cross that turned my neck green. I do not wear a cross around my neck as a good-luck charm or as some kind of talisman to protect me from harm. I wear it around my neck to remind me that I am a child of God, that I am saved by Christ, and that Christ expects me to be His disciple.

The point is that no one told me that in order to be a Christian I had to wear it. Do not let people try to disqualify you on the grounds that you do not worship in a specific way.

**V. Hope for the church...** The second thing I want to say involves a true story. Every Sunday an old man by the name of Walter had a routine. Just before 10:00 AM, he would open the doors to Epworth Church and prepare for worship. If the weather was cold, he would build a fire in the old wood stove. If it was hot, he would open all the windows and set out hand fans with a picture of Jesus on one side and an ad for a local funeral home on the other.

Next, Walter would open the Bible and read the Scripture for that week. Then, he would pray. No matter what else he prayed, he Walter ended his prayer with a plea for God to remember and bless his beloved church.

What makes this story so remarkable is that Walter was the only person there. Many years previously, Epworth church had been built on land donated by a neighboring farmer, with the stipulation that if, for any reason, they stopped meeting regularly, the property would revert to the original owners, and Epworth church would cease to exist.

Most folks would have simply shut the doors and let the inevitable happen. But, not Walter. This went on for nearly three years. And then, one Sunday morning, a young family, new to the area, visited Epworth. After meeting Walter, they joined him in worship. They found something unique about this little church. The following Sunday, they came back; and within a few weeks, their children were bringing friends. At the end of the year, a minister was hired. That was many years ago.

Today, Epworth is a small but strong church. Now, on the first Sunday of August, every year, people come from across the United States to visit the church of their youth and relive the miracle of the old man who refused to let his beloved church die. (Larry Davies, "Turning Points: A Church, the Messiah ... Wait! Why?" December 15 & December 22, 1999, [Sowseeds@hovac.com](mailto:Sowseeds@hovac.com), quoted in "Saint Search," 11/5/2000, [www.homileticonline.com](http://www.homileticonline.com))

Walter could have let others disqualify him by simply hearing their advice that he quit wasting his time and just move on. But, Walter remained true to Christ and lived not only in the hope but in his trust that God will honor faithfulness.

Do not let people try to disqualify you on the grounds that your hopes for the future of the Church are wasted time.

**VI. Disqualified by temptation...** The third thing I want to say is this. Back in April of 1999, there was an article in *Newsweek Magazine* entitled, "Mr. Jesus, Call Your Office" (*Newsweek*, April 26, 1999, 6, quoted in "Matthew Visits Monster.com," a sermon on Mark 2:13-22, February 27, 2000, found at [www.homileticonline.com](http://www.homileticonline.com)). The article says, "In the wilderness, Jesus was given several 'business opportunities' .... But he resisted them because they did not fit his mission statement."

Every week, we are given similar "business opportunities." Every week, we encounter choices. These choices involve making a decision for Christ. Do we purchase that new "something-or-other," or do we support the ministry of The Church? Do we decide to sleep in, or do we affirm Christ by being in worship? Do we allow ourselves to be lured into something harmful either to ourselves or to our families, or do we remain strong Disciples for Christ?

Plainly put, when we make decisions that exclude Christ, we are allowing temptation to disqualify us.

**VII. Let Christ rule...** A young Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) was one of 150 young men who sought entrance to the Methodist ministry in 1888. He passed the doctrinal examinations, but then faced having to deliver a trial sermon. In a huge sanctuary that could seat more than 1,000, there sat three ministers and seventy-five others who came to listen. Campbell was overwhelmed and did not do so well.

Two weeks later, Morgan's name appeared among the 105 rejected for the ministry that year. Jill Morgan, his daughter-in-law, later wrote in her book, *A Man of the Word*, "He wired to his father the one word, 'Rejected,' and sat down to write in his diary: 'Very dark everything seems. Still, He knoweth best.'"

Quickly, his father, a Baptist minister, wrote back, 'Rejected on earth. Accepted in heaven. Dad.'"

In later years, Morgan said: "God said to me in the weeks of loneliness and darkness that followed, 'I want you to cease making plans for yourself, and let Me plan your

life.”” Ultimately, there is no rejection of those accepted by Christ. (Rick Thompson, quoted in [www.sermonillustrations.com](http://www.sermonillustrations.com))

Do not let others disqualify you. Instead, let Christ rule in your hearts. Amen.

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