

DOWN WITH SELECTIVE SERVICE!
MARK 6:7-13
JULY 14, 1985

Jesus rejected selective service. Jesus did not give himself, or his disciples, or the church, or you and me, the luxury of choosing those we serve. Servants can't be choosy! Jesus said, "Whoever will may come." He did not qualify this invitation by specifying a particular life style or color or economic level. Jesus told us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners, and make disciples of all nations. He did not give us the luxury of feeding only the grateful; or clothing only those who are clean, neat and tidy; or visiting only those who are nice, polite, dress and act as we do; or preaching only to those who are "our kind of people."

In the gospel lesson for today, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go out to villages two by two. He didn't assign them to go just to the nice and appreciative. Jesus said to love everyone--meaning, do loving acts to and for everyone; but Jesus did not say that everyone was lovable or nice. Jesus was a realist. He knew what people are like. Some are not nice. Some are not lovable. That is why he said, "Love your enemies;" even those who are not only unappreciative, but nasty!

A church in southern California sponsored some refugees who promptly cheated the church out of a rather large sum of money and household goods. Some of the church members were naturally incensed and felt like never helping anyone again, but the pastor wisely counseled that service isn't based on expecting gratitude in return and that people shouldn't be surprised when the needy turn out to be sinners like everyone else. It is not surprising that some on welfare cheat; that some purchase luxury food items with food stamps. Glendon Harris writes in Pulpit Resource:

If we serve under the illusion that our work is to be directed towards "good" people, we shall be left with nothing to do for anyone. To delimit human beings with good, nice, bad, or nasty is to cut them off from the clean facts of their humanity which is more complex than simple labeling can ever capture. This "thingification" of people is what opens the trapdoor for otherwise well-intentioned religious people to end up with selective service--selecting to serve only the appreciative.

Jean Donovan wasn't too selective where she served, and it cost her her life. But those who knew her don't think she would have changed anything if the choice were given her again. At 27 she had everything: brains, success, family, love, a good education and salary, and she gave it all up to bring a small light to a land where the light is dying. She would say, "There's something else, something more I want to do." She heard about the Cleveland Diocese's mission in El Salvador and decided "I want to go there. I

want to give some time to God's work."

In the summer of 1979 when she arrived in El Salvador, the war was confined to the North. In the South where Jean would live and work, there was only an occasional police roadblock. One of only two lay workers on a team of priests and nuns, Jean straightened out the mission's bookkeeping and supervised the youth choir. She talked to the peasant women about nutrition and distributed food to undernourished infants and pregnant women. Several days a week she drove the circuit of small villages singing songs, telling stories, playing games, leading discussions and prayers and reading passages from the Bible.

Fear now hung over the country as more and more of the peasants were unhappy with their lot and the ruling junta cracked down on the poor and powerless. Jean would drive the white van, picking up the homeless, the hungry, and the wounded of both sides. More and more it became Jean's duties to help bury bodies found along the road.

On the night of December 2, 1980, Jean and three nuns were halted in their van by a group of men. They weren't worried. Few North Americans had been touched by the violence thus far, but that night no one was safe. The next day the van was found burned and abandoned. The day after, the bodies of the four women were found in a shallow grave. Each had been shot in the back of the head and two had been assaulted.

Although it was dangerous to be there, the peasants filled the open-air church for the all-night vigil over Jean Donovan's body. As she was carried out, the peasants stood, with tear-stained faces, and they applauded.

Jean Donovan was sent by God to serve. Some were not glad to see her. Some were not appreciative. Our State Department calls her a communist! She did not select those she went to serve. She obeyed God and it cost her her life.

Friday, Ellie and I went to Modesto to do yard work on our house in anticipation of today's Open House for prospective buyers. Although I admit it does look as if I tried to get out of work, I became ill. I developed a fever and had to lie down on the lawn to rest. A woman from across the street came over and insisted that I come to her house. She gave me ice water, tylenol, and let me lie down in the master bedroom. Now, she had no choice in choosing me. She could have chosen not to serve; but once she decided to be helpful and generous, she had no choice. She took me as I was-- sick, fevered and in my dirty work clothes.

The Church Gazette of the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia ran an ad recruiting missionaries which included this statement:

Persons allergic to ants, babies, beggars, chop suey, cockroaches, curried crabs, duplicators, guitars, humidity, indifference, itches, jungles, mildew, minority groups, mud, poverty, sweat and

unmarried mothers had better think twice before applying.

Let me underscore two important concepts from today's gospel lesson. First, you are not given the luxury of choosing. You cannot change your family--your parents, brothers, sisters, in-laws, your children. All are given to you. As God's people--the church--we are not given the luxury of choosing our congregation nor the clientele whom we serve. Whomever God sends is our mission--nice people, impolite people, the poor, the handicapped, the retarded, refugees, different races, different nationalities, homosexuals. Some of the gays are militant these days. Some are angry, defiant, not very "nice." But, we do not choose whom God calls us to serve.

Some persons get upset with people of different life styles, sexual orientation or economic level. Some persons are particularly disturbed when such persons are found in their own neighborhoods or church or in their own families. A family was shocked to its core to discover that a son was homosexual and, not only homosexual, but was arrested and jailed. Can you imagine the shock of his parents, siblings and grandparents? Some were angry, embarrassed, and wanted to disown him. But patience and wisdom prevailed. After all, he was their son, brother, grandson, nephew. They were his family and that relationship can never be changed. You cannot choose your family or those you will serve.

A second concept from this lesson: you are not responsible for the response you get. You are only responsible for your act, your love, your service. Isn't that freeing? Jesus was a realist. Jesus knew how some people act and react. He knew how difficult it is to work with some people. He knew how difficult it is to work out relationships with some children or parents or siblings or in-laws, or fellow church members. Jesus told his disciples to go and do God's work: preach, teach, share the love of God, cast out demons, heal people. Do what you can, Jesus said.

That is the extent of your responsibility. Do acts of love, be patient and tolerant. Sometimes the response is impolite, sometimes arrogant, sometimes angry, sometimes on terms that are contrary to the way you live, sometimes grateful and appreciative. But, you are not responsible for the response. You are only responsible for your actions.

When rejected and not welcomed, Jesus instructed, "Shake the dust off your feet." In other words, do what you are called to do, and leave the response to God. Often a seed is planted that someday grows and bears fruit. Don't do anything in anger or disappointment that might jeopardize a future reconciliation. Simply and quietly, shake the dust off your feet and leave the relationship in the care of God.

Down with selective service! You are not free to choose whom you will or will not serve. You are not responsible for the response. You are only responsible for your actions. Leave the response to God.

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