

Jon Hauerwas – October 14, 2018 – Finishing Well  
Luke 14:7-11 and Luke 14:25, 27-30

The two most frequent lessons that were conveyed to me as a child involved the values of education and hard work. My father, now enjoying retirement following a career at a nuclear facility, still owns and operates a profitable small business. My mother, who has been retired for less than a year, is now benefiting from some much-needed rest.

I want to take a moment to speak about my mother. She has degrees in biology and chemistry. And, though she completed her undergraduate degree decades ago, one of her science projects is still prominently displayed at the university where she studied. When she was a young woman, a high-ranking medical school official told her that he would personally ensure her acceptance if she wanted to become a doctor. I did not learn of this until a couple of years ago because my mother was too humble to ever mention it.

She and my father married young. He was 20. She was 18. Next year, they will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. As a young woman with small children, my mother chose not to pursue medicine. She was a realtor, a mortgage lender and, finally, a senior vice president of a bank.

I can rarely remember my mother at rest. We had dinner late because she was often home between 7 and 9 at night. Every weekend and every vacation, it seemed that my mom was still on call, answering the phone, fielding questions, typing away at the computer. Smart and talented, she was in high demand.

All of this might help explain why I, too, was comfortable in choosing a career in which I am essentially on call every day of the week, and where the lines are often blurred between my professional and personal lives. On a recent weeknight, I received a call from a church staff member about a suspicious backpack on church grounds and a door left ajar. Two staff members were present in the building that evening. Both are new to our team. I left dinner on the table and came to evaluate the situation. I talked to the staffers. I searched the building. I contacted the Properties Committee. I called the police. It was the right thing to do to put everyone at ease and to protect the people and the property that are entrusted to our care.

Fridays and Saturdays are technically days off for me. But, true days off seem more like unicorns for many pastors. Emails and phone calls

continue to arrive. Many of them are urgent. Let me offer a few examples from this week. Two days ago, I received a call from the director of the children's daycare located immediately beneath the sanctuary where we now gather. Water was not flowing in the bathrooms as it should have been. Help was needed.

Then, yesterday, I came to the church for an interview with a candidate who wishes to serve as our full-time custodian. But, even before I had arrived, I received a phone call from a staff member about chunks of plaster that had fallen at the entrance of the sanctuary. If you exit through glass doors in the back, just as you go to shake my hand, look up toward the balcony and you will see the need. There was a big mess on the floor and an obvious problem that needed to be addressed.

Friends, today is stewardship Sunday. I could easily tell you how valuable your time and financial contributions are to our shared, church community. But you've heard that all before. Instead, I want to *show* you how much your contributions are needed. I want to paint a picture for you. And I want to invite you to become a part of the solution.

Our staff and volunteer leaders are smart, capable, and deeply committed. But the simple reality is that we need more help. Our facility is massive, including the parking lot across the street, adjacent to Ohio Living – Rockynol. During my time at the church, branches along property lines have broken and fallen on cars. People in the community have inquired about parking in our lots. And we have fielded dozens of questions about safety, security, and technology.

I love being a pastor and I am proud to serve Westminster. But it is also clear to me that we have not reached our full potential. Staff members, including myself, are regularly addressing issues that are not in our area of expertise or training. We all have only so much time to give. And when an urgent issue arises, then other things get set aside. In my case, that often means sermon and worship preparation, Evotionals, visitation, and visioning. In other words, the core pastoral functions.

Your church home is very much in need of your time, your talent, and your financial contributions so that we can make this body the community that God intends. Those of us here today are the stewards of this facility, this staff, and this ministry. It is a very big undertaking.

In our second lesson this morning, we find some very practical advice from Jesus to the large crowd that was following him. He said, “whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’”

Friends, I am confident that ours is a church that wishes to see our commitments honored. We desire to be good stewards of the financial, human, and physical resources entrusted to us. We want to see our ministries succeed, and we want to leave a legacy for the future.

But if we want to finish well the race that we are running, then we are going to need to pick up the cross and make some additional sacrifices on behalf of this congregation. Today, I am speaking with you not about luxuries and wants, but about the real, everyday needs that are present throughout the life of this church.

I understand that not all of you can give more. I appreciate and respect that, and I respect you for giving all that you are able to support this shared ministry. But, to those of you who may be able to give more, I ask you to respond as you feel so moved in helping to meet the current needs of this congregation.

The church, as we all know well, is not supported by tax dollars. We have no products to sell, and all of our contributions are voluntary. All that we have is love. But, love, it turns out, is the most powerful force of all. And so, I live in hope. And I pray that you do, as well.

May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.