

“You’re fired!”

Amos 8.4-12 ; 1 Timothy 2.1-8; Psalm 138; Lk 16.1-13

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*Then Jesus said to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. 2So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.” 3Then the manager said to himself, “What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.” 5So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, “How much do you owe my master?” 6He answered, “A hundred jugs of olive oil.” He said to him, “Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.” 7Then he asked another, “And how much do you owe?” He replied, “A hundred containers of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill and make it eighty.” 8And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. 9And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. 10Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. 11If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? 13No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.’*

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When I first entered his office, I knew why I was there: I was there to succeed, to win, because I was driven!

But, did the boss know my goal? No. In fact, little did "the Donald" know that I didn't want to succeed for him at all! What I wanted was to succeed for his competitor! I was only working for him because I needed to show his competitor what I could do by showing "the Donald" that what I could do was what he didn't want! And I did just that

I wasn't surprised, then, when he called me into his office and, just before he spoke his famous words to me, looked me straight in the eye. But I was surprised by what he said:

*"You know what? I like you, even though you've wasted my time. I like you because you're smart. But, you know something else? You're too smart because you're too good! In fact, you remind me of me when I was your age. And that worries me. Because, you know what really matters, and you know that what really matters is not money. You know that what really matters is the connections that you have made, the people you have come to know, and the goal that you have. You're the kind of guy who is not going to find*

*it difficult to find another job. But, not here, because "here" is about wealth, and you're not driven by wealth. So, you're fired!"*

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On "The Apprentice" being fired is the worst thing that can happen to a person. But is it?

This morning I want you to ask yourself some other questions in order to determine whether it is the worst thing:

- what do you want out of life? what is your goal? toward what are you driving? if you are really aiming at something other than what you are spending most of your time doing, would you really mind being fired?
  - how are you going to get to where you really want to be for most of your life, but certainly by the end of your life? if what you are doing right now is keeping you from getting there, would you mind being fired?
  - what are you willing to do to get there? if what you are being asked to do right now is really against what you are willing to do to achieve your goal, would you mind being fired?
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Whatever your goal in life is, here are three things that I recommend that you do in order to figure out how best to get there.

FIRST, know what your goal is and make sure that you can reach it.

You are going to have to keep that goal in mind. You will not be able to let other things intrude and still keep your focus on the goal.

Let's say that what you want out of life is wealth and health that allows you to die at a ripe old age. Let's also assume that you are now relatively young and independent. If so, you probably stand a pretty good chance of reaching your goals as long as you work hard, eat well, and stay physically active. But, you must keep your eye on the goal. Even if it means sacrificing the little people around you as rungs on the ladder up which you climb -- which is what Amos warned of -- you must be prepared to do so. If your goal is wealth, then clearly you don't want to waste your time with activities that will not help you get to wealth. If your goal is wealth, then, you should be willing to do whatever it takes to get there. Whatever.

Let's say, on the other hand, that your goal is a life that may be wealthy or not, or one that may be characterized by health or not, but that what your real goal in life is is a life that is lived close to the very heart of the one who brought the heavens and the earth into being. If so, you will need to keep your eye on that goal of pleasing the Creator, and letting all other things fall by the wayside. That might mean that rather than sacrificing the little guy, you will be concerned to

build up the little guy, since that appears to be something that the Creator is regularly interested in doing.

SECOND, whatever your goal in life, in order to get to your goal, you will need to surround yourself with people who can help you get there, such as co-workers, friends, family.

If the people around you are those whose goals are financial and physical well-being, or those who can at least help you attain these, then these are the people you want to have around you as much as possible. This is your network. You will want them as co-workers and friends. You will need to marry into those circles.

But, if your goal is to become all that your creator and governor of this world intended you to be and wants you to be, then you need to surround yourself with people who share those goals or at least can help you to attain those goals. You will need to surround yourself with those whose hearts beat as one with God's, whose lives are characterized by some level of fellowship with God. The family gathered here at St. John's this morning may be the kind of people you really want to have around you more often.

THIRD, be prepared to be fired!

Clearly getting to any goal worth achieving is going to mean being single-hearted, being whole-hearted in your drive toward your goal. It may very likely mean abandoning what you are doing now to be committed to what you really want out of life. It may very well mean being willing to be fired from what you are doing now to do something else.

I have said this morning, for example, that if your goal is wealth, success, health, then you are going to need to consider giving up what you may have been used to until this point in your life.

I have also said that if your goal is a fellowship with God that means that wealth, success and health pale into insignificance, you may need to consider being prepared to give up what you have done thus far to gain those.

But, you might say, "Do I really need to choose? Can't I have both?" Well, think about it:

- You might have said upon entry to Donald Trump's office: "Mr. Trump, I'd like to work for you *and* for your competitor." He would have looked at you and said very correctly: "What? I thought you were smart. But, I was wrong: you're stupid! You can't work for us both. You can only have one boss."
- Or, imagine Jesus on the mountain, saying to God: "Father, Satan *is* offering me a pretty good deal. Can't I serve you both?" What do you think the Father would have responded?
- Imagine if Americans and Canadians had said in 1939: "Why should we fight this war? Surely, we can have a dictator who wants to dominate the world and still practice our freedom?" People would have said to us: "Are you crazy? You will either serve him *or* be free, but not both."

No, the attempt to avoid choices, to play both sides of the game, is wrong on all counts. As Jesus says in today's Gospel: you can only serve or love one wholeheartedly, with all of your heart.

Put simply, you can't aim at two opposing goals and achieve both. The football team that plays that way will lose. And in the case of the two choices that Jesus puts before the people who heard him is: you can't have as your goal both wealth and fellowship with God.

So, not only do you have a choice to make; you also have to make a choice.

If you are headed in a direction that is not the one that is your goal, you may end up getting fired when you change the direction you are headed. You may be let go from the job that has led you to your goals thus far because you may have been headed toward the opposite goal posts.

But, if being fired from your present job means being re-directed from a goal that is clearly at odds with the one that you really claim here this morning, then that might not be so bad after all.

Don't get me wrong. When Jesus presents a choice between fellowship with God and wealth, he is not talking of you leaving your job and becoming impoverished. In my experience the only people who speak positively about poverty are people who can afford to do so. The poor generally want to escape poverty, not embrace it.

No, what Jesus talked about, and what I am talking about, is being fired from a job that demands that you be driven toward a goal that is opposed to God, a goal that is a driven desire for wealth, rather than for a relationship with God. That "job" demands that you do whatever it takes to achieve your goal, even if it means abandoning your real goal, which is to be close to God, and those things that please God, for all of time. Being fired from such a job might be the best thing that ever happened to you!

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So, as you come to communion this morning, I want to remind you of the three questions that I asked you. As you kneel before the Lord, ask them of yourselves:

- Do I know what I want out of life?
- Do I know who it is who can help me achieve what I want out of life?
- Am I prepared to be fired from my present "job" which drives me away from God?

I would like to tell you that it is all the same to me which choice you make, but that would be dishonest on my part. My hope is that you will think about your decision before you make it.

As you do, I want you to remember the following:

- If you choose wealth, success, and physical health as the goal -- or goal-post -- toward which you drive, please remember that while you may get there, you may not. You may

get fired from your job that you put all your hopes in. You may lose your health when you least expect it. You have no guarantee that you will gain your goal.

- But, if you choose to live your life in fellowship with God, I can tell you here with all boldness that you have His guarantee, sealed with blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, that you will achieve your goal and that you will never, ever, lose that goal, even in death.

While the choice is yours, I want to assure you that if you choose to drive toward the goal of fellowship with God, you will make it, you will be on the winning side.

As you come to communion, I'd like you to reflect on your choice.