

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(January 21, 2018)

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Next Steps

Archippus and Friends

Study #3

(Colossians 4:17 and more2 Timothy 2:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20)

Introduction: Not making the cut...

The little league baseball coach who cut me from a team I had tried out for when I was about thirteen was very kind AND very honest.

He told me that, while I didn't measure up to the players who did make the team, if I worked hard on my baseball skills over the next few months, I could possibly make the team next year. I remember that it was a long walk home that day.

Maybe you've had that kind of a walk after baseball tryouts or for some other sports team. Or maybe it was for a talent show or for an academic competition. Or perhaps you've had and lost a job for the same sorts of reasons.

In some venture or other, you didn't make the cut. And the message - even if delivered kindly - was, *"You don't have what it takes to contribute here."*

That message hurts. It's not an unusual message to hear. Now, would you like to hear a different message?

Jesus is putting together a team. He's looking for walk-ons. He welcomes you on to His team. There are openings at all positions. There are no bleachers to sit on and there is no bench to warm. It's "game on" and He wants you to play.

On-the-job training will overcome any lack of experience. Inability will be whipped by availability and teachability. Jesus will equip you so that you can contribute to what He's doing in the world.

You may not ever be invited to serve on a mayoral blue-ribbon committee. You may not have gotten a call from the Spurs to fill in for Kawhi Leonard.

But Jesus has called you to be a part of His mission. And, as we've seen over the past couple of Sundays, there is no life like the life given to Jesus' mission.

Today is the third Sunday of 2018 and this is the third message I'm giving in the current series. I aim to make each message I deliver a stand-alone message. I want each message to be a tree strong enough to stand on its own. But it's often good to step back and look at the forest.

So, here's our current forest.

Review and preview...

Last September, Northwest held an annual meeting that was unlike any our church had ever had, complete with a full meal, courtesy of the Biro's and Encuentro and others.

At that meeting, the elders gave some time to a presentation of God's gracious hand in providing us with a 60-fold financial windfall in the form of a land sale. We emphasized how important it is that we approach the use of those soon-to-come proceeds with prayer and grace and love.¹

At the meeting, we also highlighted two aspects of a vision for what would become our *reality* and our *reputation*.

¹ \$40k for the two acres on Guilbeau that we sold for \$120k; \$125k for the twelve acres we bought on Old Tezel; \$2.5 million for the sale of ten of those acres.

First, we want to BE and to BE KNOWN AS a church that engages in the passionate pursuit of life-changing relationships with God, with each other, and with our world.

And, second, we want to BE and BE KNOWN AS a church where impact is disproportionate to our size so that everybody will know that what is happening here is nothing other than God at work.

At that meeting, too, the Elders unpacked a new statement of our church's mission, "*We help you take next steps with Jesus so that you can help others take next steps with Jesus*" and we described a strategy that we will follow to help us fulfill that mission: make disciples, develop leaders, deploy Christians to serve, and plant churches.

And all of that is what this series of messages that opens 2018 is all about.

Over the past couple of Sundays, I have highlighted what we mean by the Mission Statement and have tried to explain that disciple-making (disciples making disciples; you and me, helping others take next steps with Jesus) is the biblical way to develop leaders.

Today, I'm continuing on this theme of our church's mission strategy. My focus is on the beauty of God's plan for each of us. That the stewardship and privilege of every believer in Jesus is life-changing, front-line ministry/service.

To orient to some of what I believe God may have in store for each of us here today, I'll introduce you to one of my favorite New Testament characters.

We meet this character near the end of Paul's letter to the Colossians. In the last paragraph of Colossians, there are some personal messages to various members of the church at Colossae. After a couple of these greetings², Paul sent a highly individualized message to one man.

² Paul wanted the believers in Colossae to warmly greet the Christians in the nearby city of Laodicea for him. And he honored a sister in the Lord, Nympha, who evidently opened her home to the church for regular worship, with a greeting.

Meet Archippus, An Un-sung Hero (Colossians 4:17)

[17] Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Who is Archippus?

We find Archippus' name in only one other place in the New Testament. When Paul jotted off a short note to his friend, Philemon, he mentioned ***[Philemon 2] Archippus our fellow soldier.***

From this we gather that Archippus was a faithful follower of Christ and that he lived in Colossae. Beyond that, we know nothing about Archippus.

One commentator (Abbott) thinks that Archippus may have been the son of Philemon, the man to whom "Philemon" was written. But, there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that.

Here in Colossians 4:17, though, Paul mentions Archippus' "***ministry.***" What ministry was that?

What was Archippus' Ministry? (good question)

One of my commentaries suggests that Archippus gave pastoral oversight to the church (Herbert Carson). Again, there is nothing in the verse to suggest that.

Another couple of scholars believe that he could have been an evangelist. Yet again, there is nothing in the verse to lead us to that conclusion.

Archippus' ministry is left undefined.

The word Paul used to describe his ministry - a word we, today, may associate with a formal church structure - is a word that is often translated simply, "service" (*diakonia*).

It is not a liturgical, or "stained-glass" word. (that word would be *leitourgia*).

Archippus' ministry/service could have involved preaching, leading music, waiting on tables, or sweeping floors.

One of my more honest books has this, *"It is difficult to be precise as to the particular form of ministry which had been committed to him."*

I'll go you one better than that. It is not just difficult. It is *impossible* to know what ministry Archippus had received in the Lord!

Now, I'm sure that Archippus and the church in Colossae knew exactly what Paul was referring to. But readers from the first century on haven't had a clue.

He might have had a ministry among the poor or the slave classes. He might have had a ministry to children, to lepers, or to the aristocracy. He might have been a teacher in the church, or a discipler of young converts.

It could have been anything.

And Paul tells Archippus, this faithful soldier of Jesus, to fulfill the ministry which he has received in the Lord. We hear those words and we wonder...

Paul's Words to Archippus - and YOU!

Was Paul warning Archippus, *"Get busy and fulfill your ministry!"*, essentially scolding Archippus for not fulfilling his ministry? Or, was Paul honoring Archippus by affirming that he had been given a ministry and was fulfilling it?

We don't know. But the verse provokes serious thought. In fact, the idea that rises out of Colossians 4:17 is the basis for the rest of my remarks this morning.

It is also the idea on which I hang my hopes that this chapter of our church's life will be more God-honoring, more fulfilling, more Kingdom-centered, and more impactful than any we've known.

Here it is:

If Archippus - a man mentioned only briefly in the New Testament - received a ministry from God and was urged by Paul to fulfill it, doesn't it follow that every believer in Jesus has received a ministry from God and needs to be careful to fulfill it?

I mean, if Archippus received a ministry in the Lord, why not us in 2018? Why not everybody at Northwest? Why not you?

Why not accept the idea that the Lord Jesus has a position for you to play, a place on His team, a ministry to fulfill?

It's a pretty overwhelming thought that the Lord of lords has a work for you to do - but I believe it's true. And in the time we have remaining this morning, I want to develop three "big ideas" that rise from this idea.

Two of them derive directly from the Bible's teaching about you and your ministry. The third "big idea" is more the outline of how we here at Northwest, could apply the first two "big ideas."

First, a thought about destinations.

Archippus Speaks to Us

You, Unleashed for Service (Ephesians 4)

Attendance is step one...

I believe that coming to church is a good thing (and, of course, you're glad that I think that). I'm glad you're here, and if you brought a friend, I'm glad you and your friend are both here.

But getting to church is not "Mission: Accomplished" for the Great Commission.

After a while of attending our church, we hope that you will get plugged into community and will grow as a worshipping disciple.

But it is not a “win” if you are ONLY plugged into community and taking part in worship. Attendance at church, without ministry output, is not a kingdom win.

Being a regular church attender is not anyone’s idea of a Great Commission “Mission: ACCOMPLISHED.” Showing up is no one’s final destination.

No, once you come to our church or to any other church and start taking next steps with Jesus, the church is your launch pad into Great Commission service.

As Ephesians 4:11-12 tell us, the ministry belongs to everyone who believes in Jesus.

[11] And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, [12] for the equipping of the SAINTS (that’s you!) for the work of service (or, literally “ministry”)

Ministry internal to the church

Some of you may mostly fill that mission within the confines of the church (teaching, leading, serving, etc...).

And if you have gifting and passions to serve within the church, GREAT! You will bless lots and lots of people by your service here!

But here’s the thing.

There are lots and lots of wonderful settings in which you might serve the Great Commission: at home and in the neighborhood, at work or at church, in the larger community, and globally.

Now, to be clear, I believe Paul would applaud service in a local church. And I am both very interested in ministry happening in our church and very grateful for the many, many servants here.

You teach and lead and cleanup and setup and bring music and make cookies and give generously - and so much more. God bless you!

But, if we fill every ministry post here - which would be great, but we’re not there yet! - there would be lots of people NOT deployed into service because there are more people at Northwest than there are service slots in our formal ministries.

And, if our primary and most obvious aim is to fill every service position at our church, we won’t make much progress in reaching a needy city and world for Jesus.

So, you who are serving Jesus in the church are serving those who are here. That’s great and necessary. You are providing a strong base that equips Christ-followers to move forward.

Ministry external to the church

But some of you will fulfill your ministry outside of the structure of the church. You will serve those in Jesus’ Name who may never come here. That’s also great and necessary.

As I understand my pastoral role from Scripture, my assignment from Jesus is not to grow the church. Your assignment is not to grow Northwest Community Church.

Our job, together, is to be salt and light for Jesus and to penetrate our culture like leaven in a lump of dough. My job and the job of the leadership, is to equip you for ministry - at home, in church, at work, in the neighborhood, in the community, and globally.

Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16). Our church - and every other expression of the church (including Crossroads Baptist, Tezel Oaks Church of the Nazarene, City Church, Communion Chapel, Agape Iglesia Bautista on Braun, to name just a few nearby) - are tools to advance God’s kingdom-wide purposes.

Summary: To sum up this point, attendance at church is a good thing! But attendance at church is not “Mission: Accomplished.” The Mission moves forward only when you move forward in serving Jesus.

So, that’s a thought about direction. Now, a thought about identity, direct from the Apostle Peter.

You, a Priest to God (1 Peter 2:9)

[1 Peter 2:9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.³

Out of this verse (and a few others; i.e. - 1 Timothy 2:5; Revelation 5:10) comes the teaching that every believer in Jesus is a priest to God. This teaching was one of the pillars of the Protestant Reformation.

And when we speak of “the priesthood of all believers” we mean that every Christian:

- is gifted (by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit) to understand and to apply Scripture without the aid of a church authority.⁴
- has the privilege of praying directly to God without needing to go through an intermediary (like a priest).
- has a special call to ministry.

The idea that those who have come to know Christ by faith are priests to God comes right out of Scripture.

So, yes, it is true that I have a call to ministry. I am seeking to fulfil my call to a pastoral ministry. But it is also true that YOU have a call to ministry.

And there is nothing more thrilling than serving God in an arena of your particular passion and gifting. There is nothing like knowing that you are involved, up close and personal, at the pointy end of the spear, on the front lines, in God's plan for advancing His kingdom. Again, there is no life like the life given to Jesus' mission.

And it is God's will for YOU to be fully deployed in significant, Kingdom-of-God sized, eternally significant **mission**.

³ See also Hebrews 13:15-16; Romans 15:15-16 for references to believers in Jesus being priests to God and fulfilling priestly function.

⁴ Martin Luther argued that since all believers are under our High Priest, Jesus, we are each responsible for our own spiritual life in the community of the church.

Summary: To sum up this point, in Christ, there are no mission NOBODIES. In Christ, everybody is a mission SOMEBODY.⁵

So, as we move forward into this next chapter of our church's life, I want to say to each one of you, just as Paul said to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.”

What does that mean? For one thing, it means that everybody listens to the Holy Spirit.

You, a 2018 Archippus

Everybody Listens to the Holy Spirit

You and I, having trusted Christ for salvation, are priests to God. Like Archippus, we have been given a ministry to fulfill. Therefore, we need to be sensitive in at least two arenas.

One, we've all got to be alert to our own passions and desires and giftings.

For instance, do you have a special passion for the needs of the elderly, the poor, the unborn, the young? Do you have particular abilities to connect with people who are suffering? With people who are struggling? Are you gifted to speak? To serve? Musically? Athletically? Academically?

These are all important elements of who you are and who God made you to be. Knowing what moves and drives you will often alert you to ways in which the Lord might want to use you.

Two, be on high alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to move. By “promptings” I refer to anything that the Spirit of God might use to direct you:
the counsel of a friend;

⁵ I am deeply indebted to Frank Tillapaugh, former pastor of Bear Valley Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado, who wrote The Church Unleashed, a book that inspired me with a vision for “unleashing” many years ago with these thoughts.

the discovery of a need;
 an internal nudge to speak into a situation;
 words that come to mind, calling you to action. (seemingly out of
 nowhere) that align with Scripture *and* your passions *and* a pressing
 need.

Then, when you sense the Spirit's prompting meshing with
 your passions to serve and with Scripture's teachings AND you see a
 door opening that would allow you to leverage your passions to make a
 difference for Jesus, move! Step up! Serve!

And there are so many contexts and settings in which to serve!

Everybody Serves

Serving in the church

Again, your primary service could be centered around the
 formal structure of the church. There are lots of places to invest time,
 talent, and treasure here!

Your priestly service might involve holding babies in the
 church nursery or serving the next generation of Christ-followers in
 Sunday School. You might join Landry Saathoff in equipping teens to
 follow Jesus. Or, you might lead a Care Group or join the Praise Team.
 For all of us, it will involve prayer and financial generosity. And it
 might involve any of dozens of other ways to serve here in the church.

There are great open doors to serve children, youth, and adults
 here, and you could very well find your ministry "sweet spot" by
 plugging into service here.

But there are also so many ways to serve Jesus outside of the
 formal church structure.

Serving in your daily life

Adopt a mindset that says, "I want to serve in Jesus' Name" and
 taking a meal to a new neighbor or bringing food where there has been
 sickness is MINISTRY.

With a heart to help someone take a next step with Jesus,
 visiting a co-worker in the hospital or taking time to listen to a
 discouraged friend is MINISTRY.

Taking a few minutes to point a friend to Jesus is MINISTRY.

I know that many of you are involved in those kinds of
 activities all day long. You may not have ever thought of them as
 "ministries", but, carried out with a passion to press Jesus into your
 service, they are exactly what New Testament ministry is all about.

It need not be grandiose or flashy, and it certainly need not
 occur within the church. Under the radar and behind the scenes service
 IS Kingdom-of-God sized stuff.

Or, you might discover existing ministries in our community
 where you would really enjoy plugging in. For instance...

Serving with existing ministries

Over the years, people from Northwest have served with LeRoy
 Jacobson's ministry to teens through Youth for Christ. They have
 opened their homes and hearts to teens on the High School campus and
 THAT has been their ministry.

Others have gotten involved at crisis pregnancy centers, and
 have served women, their unborn babies, and these babies' fathers.

Some have served the Lord at military bases, plugging into
 ministries there, assisting chaplains, attending and helping with base
 chapel services, discipling men and women in uniform.

And there's more!

We have recently been delighted to welcome Joe and Liz Page
 to Northwest. They are prayer warriors AND they also lead a vibrant,
 God-honoring ministry. "Threads of Love" serves families who have
 premature babies with clothing and care items in the Name of Jesus.
 Contact Joe and Liz if you'd like to serve these needy families. It is a
 wonderful ministry.

Then, there's JD and Kristi Gerard. They are a great couple and are involved in both Encuentro and here on the English side at Northwest. But their full-time work is with a ministry called Destino. Destino reaches out to Hispanic college students here in San Antonio.⁶ If your heart stirs to help college students on the UTSA campus take next steps with Jesus, JD and Kristi would love to get with you.

There are other ministries here in San Antonio that serve Syrian refugees, international students, victims of sex trafficking and the sex trade, those with drug and alcohol addictions - all in Jesus' Name.

Is your heart stirring? Want information? Give me a call this week and I'll help you take the first step of finding out more.

So, you might choose to jump on board with something that is already up and running.

Or, the Lord might put it on your heart to initiate some entirely new way to serve and to push Jesus' purposes forward. It's certainly happened before...

Creating new ministries

I have long been impressed (no longer surprised, just amazed) at the capacity for creativity that lives in the hearts of Jesus followers when it comes to finding ways to serve as salt and light in the world.

For example...

Bread & Water

Bread and Water began as the brainchild of a few High School and then college students nearly ten years ago here at Northwest. It is a ministry of love to some of our most vulnerable adults. The goal of Bread and Water, from the beginning, has been to lavish value and love on the homeless in Jesus' Name. Provide food and conversation.

These young adults gave great leadership to Bread and Water for several years. After a while Ken Eberhardt took the reins, until his health failed. Now, James Stopher is heading up Bread and Water.

Bread and Water has never asked for anything from the church except recognition, prayer and counsel, and no one has ever been made to feel guilty for not being involved. People serve whose hearts stir them to serve.

Over the years, many of the recipients of Bread and Water's ministry have experienced God's love through those who serve.

Several have come to faith in Christ. We've had lots of sweet times at church together, have held some very meaningful memorial services for those who have passed away, made lots of great connections, and have had lots of opportunities to love.

And here's the thing. Bread and Water wasn't thought up by staff or elders.

You, members of the Body here, thought it up, organized it, led it, and are leading it still. And over the years of Bread and Water's life, our church and homeless men and women have been thoroughly blessed.

This has been the case with numerous ministries.

- For many years, every Christmas we have participated in Project Angel Tree and have delivered gifts to the children of incarcerated parents. Every Christmas, too, we have collected presents to share Jesus' love with children around the world through Operation Christmas Child. These ministries have happened because of leaders.
- Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace University* (classes start today!!) has been led by several people through the years. The classes run when there is a leader to lead it.
- We are a host site for the South Texas Blood and Tissue Center and have blood drives every year - organized and led by a leader with a heart to serve.
- Some years ago, because we had people who knew American sign language, we offered signing for the hearing-impaired.

⁶ Destino is a ministry arm of Cru. (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ)

- Our Food Pantry was organized to serve those with food insecurities in our city. A leader and lots of volunteers pack bags and bring groceries to be distributed. And now, we provide about one hundred bags of groceries a month (= 1,200 meals).
- We've never had an *English as a Second Language* class here...until a leader emerged to head it up. Now in its second year, ESL is serving people from different parts of the world and teaching people who need fluency in English and providing connection - all in Jesus' Name.

Conclusion:

Today, I want to be really clear about a few things.

One, Christians who don't serve, don't grow.

Two, the Great Commission doesn't move forward unless Christians serve.

Three, serving in Jesus' Name IS the abundant life Jesus promised.

You are a 2018 Archippus, and you are to be at maximum for the Great Commission, serving where you are gifted and passionate.

Paul would say to you, ***[Northwest Community Church 4:17]***
Say to _____, (your name) "Take heed to the ministry that you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."