

Sermon: Reverence, Just in Case?

Year C, Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Scouting Sunday

[Isaiah 6:1-8, \(9-13\); Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11](#)

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Most of you know this, but just so we're all on the same page. To be a minister in the UCC, you have to have a college degree, you have to have a master's degree that takes three years to get, you have to have served for several months in a hospital or nursing home, you have to have written a number of papers outside of what you had to do in school. And you have to convince at least three separate groups of people who don't know you very well or at all that you should be a minister.

You would think with all that, when it's time to be a minister, you'd know what you're supposed to do. That is not so. For instance, they do not teach you what to do when your sanctuary is on the second floor, and the lights for the stair landings are way in the back, so far back that when you lean in to turn them on you catch the front of your shirt on the handrail and rip the buttons off. Right here. And it's Christmas Eve. Your first Christmas Eve. They don't teach you what to do then. They also don't teach you how to not say all the things you're not supposed to say if you're a minister in church on Christmas Eve and you rip the buttons off your shirt.

But the Scouts taught me. I will not be specific, since it's a personal area, but I will say that I had enough safety pins going on you could have shot me in the chest and it would have bounced right off.

Now I am willing to bet that at this moment, in this room, there are people in here who are not ministers who have at least one spare safety pin with them. Just in case. And that let's me make this point, if what scouting teaches you is to have spare safety pins, just in case, you may have missed the best part of Scouting.

As a minister, I put together the bulletin each week, I put together the worship service that it guides us through. And one of the most important things to make a church service work is music. And that is not a gift I've been given. I can't read music. I don't know how to tell if something is singable. I can even tell if I know the hymn or not, because sometimes they use the same tune with different words.

I looked at my badge sash. I didn't have a music badge from back in the day. And I know one path Scouting would have offered me. Don't know much about music? If you work on this badge, you'll get exposed to some of the fundamentals. You won't learn everything. But you'll learn a lot. And what you learn you'll be able to apply as you go along.

Honestly, I tried that. I played the flute for a year in elementary school. That was agony for just about everyone involved. I tried playing the guitar for a year in high school. Didn't even make it to 6 months. I took piano lessons as an adult one summer. But my brain, it just doesn't have the shape it needs to think musically. I need more time and space to figure out how I can get notes on the page to mean something to me and it's going to have to be a way that most musicians don't use.

So, is that all Scouting has to offer me? If I can't earn the badge, they're going to shrug and say, "too bad." If you had heard me play the flute or the guitar, that might have been the smartest

answer. But one of my strongest memories from Scouting was being at some event with multiple troops, and my troop was supposed to lead a sing-along. I knew the song so I was leading all the kids in singing. We had the words on an overhead projector, which I'm not even going to try to explain, because to people have smart phones, it going to sound like I had a pterodactyl. But everyone could see the words, and I did my thing, getting everyone to give it a try. We sounded great in the end. And the adults in the room were surprised by how well it went. They asked me to represent the Scouts at the Memorial Day service for the town.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

It was a long time ago. I still remember it. Scouting gives gifts that last a lifetime.

Fast forward to when I came to this church, in the very first week, I had to say to everyone, "I need help. I can't pick the hymns. I don't know what I'm doing." And you know what they did? Three people stepped forward and said, *Here I am; send me* (Isaiah 6:8) And every time someone had to step back because their life got busy, someone else stepped forward. They told me that all I had to do was use YouTube to hear the hymns. When I said that what was on YouTube was so over orchestrated, it all sounded like they had a 500-person choir and a hymns symphony orchestra, and that I still couldn't imagine what they would sound like in this church, someone set up a spreadsheet of every single hymn in our hymnal, all 845 of them, and found someone on YouTube who had recorded most of the hymns on a piano. For me. So I could do what I need to do.

Scouting taught me to ask for help when I need it. Scouting taught me that what we do together is far more than what we can do on our own. Look at today's reading from Luke.

Jesus is just beginning his ministry. He hasn't even had four years of college and three years at seminary and all the rest. He's just starting out. He's teaching on the beach. And people are really getting into it, they're listening, but they're also crowding in around him, making it hard for other people to hear. Jesus looks around and sees a couple of boats pulled up, so he hops into one and has Simon Peter row him out just a little ways from shore. Now the people on the beach can see and hear him. Jesus needed help. He didn't need help with the preaching, he's got that down. He needs a fisherman who has a boat who can get him to the right place to be effective in what he's trying to do.¹

Look at Simon Peter, James and John. They fish together, in two boats. They use nets to catch as many fish as they can. It's not one guy with a rod and reel. It's fishing to catch enough to sell. It takes team work and they've been working like dogs all night and have nothing to show for it. The last thing they need is another fisherman to come over and tell them what they should do.² But Jesus, this teacher guy who's hopped into Simon Peter's boat, he seems to have something else going on. Something compelling and interesting that they sense in him makes

¹ Richard F. Ward, "Protagonist corner." *Journal For Preachers* 30, no. 2 [2007]: 50.

² Ward, 50.

them willing to try something as illogical and impractical as rowing over to some spot he's chosen and try casting their nets one more time.³

Now if you listen to this story from the life of Jesus and you hear an assurance that following Jesus will let you experience so much of God's abundance that your ship will all but sink⁴, go ahead. You would also not be missing the point, if you thought that when we are called to follow Jesus, we have to leave a lot behind, profession, friends and family, worldly goods.⁵ And if you think that Jesus calls disciples to a life for which they are wholly unqualified and entirely untrained,⁶ I've got to admit there's a lot of truth in that interpretation, at least based on my personal experience.

But the point I want to make with this story is this. If you take the Scouting Law of *being reverent* to mean that you should only be reverent to God, then I wonder if you are reducing it to the same thing as *being prepared* means having safety pins, just in case.

By all means, be reverent to God. But be reverent to those who ask "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). Because the teacher or coach or parent or scoutmaster or boss who is asking deserves an enthusiastic answer. They are offering us the opportunity to do something we have no idea how to do, something we do not have the skills to accomplish alone. They are offering us the chance to say, "*Here I am; send me*". We can certainly follow that up with "I have no idea what I'm doing and I'll need help, but I'm more than willing to try to do something together with people with skills other than my own."

Finally, be reverent to yourself. Each of us carries immense skills. Each of us has talents beyond anyone's imagining, including our own. And each of us has complete blank spots, places where not even the nugget of a fragment of a fiber of a gift is. But Scouting, or our faith, has taught us to ask for help and to accept it with reverence for the giver. Jesus showed that he understood that to accomplish something that will improve the world, you need to bring together people with wildly different talents. And you need to treat them with reverence and respect.

So, since I have not been given the gift of music, but I revere those who have, I'd like to ask that we all join together to wrap up this reflection, by singing the first verse of *Here I Am Lord*. The words are in your bulletin. Feel free to sit or stand as you choose.

Amen.

³ Howard K. Gregory, "The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Pastoral Perspective, Luke 5:1-11" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 333.

⁴ Gay L. Byron, "The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Exegetical Perspective, Luke 5:1-11" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 337.

⁵ Gregory, 336.

⁶ Beverly R. Gaventa, "Epiphany 5 (C): Luke 5:1-11" in *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year C*, ed. Charles B. Cousar et al. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994], 140.