

Christ in My Chaos, II

Spectacularly Insignificant

January 12, 2003

I'M NO FLANNEL GRAPH

Picture yourself tagging along behind Jesus, longing for him to choose you as one of His disciples. Suddenly, without warning, He turns around, looks you straight in the eyes, and says, "Follow Me!" Your heart races, you begin to push through the crowd, running toward Him. And then He says: "Oh, not you ... sorry, I meant the guy behind you."

Even though we love Jesus, and we know He loves us, we can often feel like we don't measure up to the kind of people He *really* uses.

- My spiritual life is not the stuff of flannel-graphs.

Q: Remember those two-dimensional felt-cloth Bible-heroes: Samson destroying the pagan temple; Noah collecting the animals.

- Trouble is they *are* only presenting two dimensions:

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. - Judges 16:1 NIV

One day [Noah] became drunk on some wine he had made and lay naked in his tent. - Genesis 9:21 NLT

- I don't remember these flannel-graphs!
- Jeepers! Attendance is sure up in Mrs. Swenson's class!

It's oddly reassuring that none of the OT heroes or the NT disciples "measure up": David, adultery; Jonah, rebellion; Gideon, idolatry; Jacob, deception; Solomon, depression; Peter, denial; John-Mark, defection; Thomas, skepticism; Paul, persecution, and on and on.

- Every disciple was imperfect, incomplete, and inexperienced

When people do seem to "measure up" you can bet you've "flannel-graphed" 'em - you're only seeing two dimensions.

A father's in a supermarket, pushing a cart with a screaming, bellowing baby in it. He keeps calmly reassuring, "We're almost done, Albert ... don't scream, Albert ... I know you hate this Albert, but try not to throw a fit." A woman next to him says, "You should be commended for your compassion with your son." The man looks at her and says, "Lady ... I'm Albert!"

Because we've heard edited bits of Bible stories over and over, and spectacular slices of testimonies on TV, radio, in books and at events, it's easy to conclude that:

- If God isn't doing something spectacular through us, we're not all that useful.

SPIRITUAL INDUSTRY

There's a whole industry of books, tapes, and formulas, that promise to help us produce astonishing, impressive feats of spirituality.

Friday night I was asked about the Daniel diet - "Test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water" (Dan 1:12) - and was asked if I knew how well it worked to influence or persuade God's hand.

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. - 1 Samuel 17:38-40 NIV

The good programs target our intimacy with, devotion to, and humility in the Lord.

- They help us to discover our unique assignment.

The destructive ones give us a set of armor and guarantee us the same results they've had with it. Like Saul, they fail to consider:

- Some of us were only given a slingshot to fight our giants

We need to be careful when we give advice that's based on our past victories; two similar believers can pray and fast the same way, with vastly different results.

NEVER GOT A FLANNEL-GRAPH

Q: Do you remember the Dean Martin celebrity roasts?

Q: Remember Red Buttons describing people who "never got a dinner"?

In Romans 16, Paul thanks 29 “insignificant” unknowns, including:

Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea [**never got a flannel-graph!**] (Rom 16:1)

Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ [**never got a flannel-graph!**] (Rom 16:9)

Apelles, tested and approved in Christ [**never got a flannel-graph!**] (Rom 16:10)

These were just ordinary Godly people doing tiny but essential acts of service for the Kingdom of God.

RAYS AND GRAINS

The spiritual life is mostly a life of determined faithfulness: little decisions; tiny steps; and unimpressive contributions.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on.” – Mark 12:41-44 NIV

We are each asked to give out of our poverty.

- EXTRA, EXTRA: Insignificant woman makes insignificant donation.

Yet, Jesus sees something spectacular in her insignificance ... it has nothing to do with size and success, but everything to do with faith and fortitude (perseverance, resolve, determination).

God calls *some* people to “big” things sometimes ... but *each* of us is called daily to be salt and light to our world.

Ever put one grain of salt on your eggs?

- Not much of a contribution ... if only I was Tabasco sauce!

I cringe when I hear preachers say that being a pastor is the highest calling. How ignorant; it’s punishment! The highest calling is to season our world, one grain at a time, wherever the Lord decides to sprinkle us.

One thing that really makes the Lord angry is the false humility that we aren’t good enough to be used; it comes from an arrogant notion that it’s our skills and abilities that accomplish His purposes.

- Competence is not a fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the things the Lord perfects in us in spite of our level of know-how.

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. - Exodus 4:10-14 NIV

Q: What's your excuse? We all have them.

- His power is made perfect in our weakness ... His grace is sufficient.

RUN AS TO WIN

- In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul instructs us to: "Run as to win."

Lisa was the anchor runner on a girl's 1500 meter relay team (her school had so few students anyone who tried out made it). Her team got to represent their league at a state tournament (her school had the only girl's 1500 meter relay team in the league).

On race day, a lot of people were surprised they even showed up. But Lisa was all smiles. Her nervous teammates asked her how she could be so relaxed, happy, excited even. She told them:

Why be anxious? We know the outcome; we'll do our best and we'll come in last ... but *we'll* get the standing ovation, because:

- Determination and perseverance have more value than victory.

When the winners crossed the line, the people cheered. Then they looked across the track began to yell: Come on! You can make it!

And as Lisa wobble-sprinted across the finish line, she threw her arms back and her chest forward and collapsed in the arms of her teammates ... and the crowd stood and cheered and applauded.

- Because when you run as to win, you've already won.

Don't buy into the lie that you're just tagging along. Jesus has this to say to you:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - John 15:16 NIV