

Luke 1: 67-79

O Lord, let the words of my mouth and the ruminations of our hearts be righteous in thy sight. Amen.

Today's passage from Luke tells of Zacharias, father of John, prophecying about preparing the way of the Lord:

*Blessed be the lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people...  
that we should be saved from our enemies...  
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers.  
And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest: for  
thou shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways,  
To give light unto them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

[long pause]

Architects - I am one – have a favorite cartoon strip passed down from generation to generation. It concerns various popular images of the architect at his work.

- As seen by the structural engineer, the architect designs a tree house supported by many limbs which are never connected to the tree itself, and hence unsupportable;
- As seen by the client, the architect is so busy sending bills for his work, that he somehow never gets to the finish actual design;
- As seen by the developer, the architect is a lavish spender with no concern for other people's money;
- As seen by the public, the architect is a fast-talking huckster, only out to swindle the innocent out of their birthright;

you get the idea...

- but in the final panel, as seen by HIMSELF, the architect strides above the masses shrouded in gloom and confusion, carrying high the torch of truth, inspiration, invention and right-thinking to lead them out of darkness to a better world.

Indeed something like

*"To give light unto them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

We laugh at the joke, and smile knowingly at the various interpretations, but somewhere deep inside... each of us believes in that last image.

So when is any one of us called to lead?

Ever?

Too often?

Who do we think we are? Could habitually volunteering be only arrogance and self-aggrandizement, or mistaken over-confidence?

Or does the ability to see a need, to think that we might, ourselves, be able to provide an answer and gather "*the people*" to join in an effort, does that come from inside?

Is it "God-given"?

Of course that depends upon how you define "God", but THAT'S outside of my purview, and certainly beyond this modest homily.

But where DOES it come from?...

- this inclination to lead,

- to take control of a situation,

- to find joy in organizing a band of followers to share your vision of what needs to be accomplished, -

- and to carry it through to completion or resolution?

What about the flip side –

where does the certain knowledge that FOLLOWING is a better course, where does that come from?

What makes it instantly clear that SOMEONE ELSE has the better idea, the greater skill, the more applicable experience...or simply the greater wisdom?

Even when that realization takes a longer time, reasoned deliberation, often resolving conflicting imperatives –

where does that understanding come from?

When Jesus tells the future disciple working his field, "No, do not go home to say good-bye. If you want to come with me, you must do it this instant. Just put down your plow and follow," that sounds unreasonable, too harsh, for me. But that story is about divine leadership, and I should continue examining mere mortal endeavor.

Let's think for a moment about what is inherent in each of us – what we are born with, as opposed to what is learned by each of us, what family, school, peers, our society

teaches us – the old “Nature vs. Nurture” debate. Of course the “Nurture” side of one’s upbringing predisposes us to accept - even to seek - leadership. Were we raised to think that WE could do it, and maybe do it better than most everyone else? Was our family successful in their fields? And with that success did there come a sense of social responsibility, of obligation? And is there humility in recognizing that everyone is not as fortunate.

Or do we battle simply on our own terms, rising in spite of our background, to be in that only 8% of the American economic lowest one-fifth that rises to the top fifth, as shown in a Harvard study released last week? That surely is “Nature”, and come from inside – and is it “God-given”, if you will?

To get back to the architect (firmer ground for me), especially one who starts his/HER own firm, there is a desperate balance between following your own vision and experience, and listening hard to the advice/direction of others - and sometimes adopting and making it your own.

The architect learns quickly – it starts in architecture school, if not well before – that everyone else, EVERYONE, has a view of the project from his own point of view:

- the client - may simply want something he has seen before, and will not be interested in exploring other possibilities. It’s all he knows, of course, so you have some educating to do;

- the builder - likely wants to make life as simple and cost-effective for himself as he can, so he can do it faster and make more profit on the project. But it is not unusual for a contractor to indeed have a better way, so you have to listen;

- the local building code inspector - will interpret the rules as he sees fit. He will “know” that he is protecting the public interest, no matter how unreasonable some of those provisions may be. You best be able to find “compliance alternatives” or you have lost control of the outcome;

- your own team - draftmen, CADD operators, engineers, cost estimators, construction specialists, especially other design consultants such as landscape, interior, lighting, etc.; will all seek to maximize the advantage to their own disciplines. It’s only natural.

But YOU are the architect, the one who has ultimate responsibility for the final outcome of the project. When done, you will have to answer to yourself and the outside world, will the result

- best serve the needs of the client,
- work well (be a good house to live in, etc.),
- cost what it should,
- will it be safe and easy to maintain,

- be finished on time,
- indeed, will it be an asset to the larger community?

and, (a critical part of leadership)...

- have you been able to do all this in a business-like enough manner so that with your fee you can pay your staff and consultants reasonably, promote new work, and keep enough for yourself so that it all makes sense?

Now, all of this is hardly where we started:

*“thou shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways,  
To give light unto them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace,”*

even if, from the inside, from time to time it feels like something akin.

At least being a serious architect is good training for trying to be a responsible and effective member of society.

Does God put us on this earth to sometimes be a leader? Does that count *“to perform the mercy promised to our fathers”*.

I hope you have found this to be a useful question. Even more, I hope that you will find joy in your answer, or at least in the search.

Amen

almost 1,300 words; +/- 10 minutes