

“Are You In Position?” – August 20, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Credo in Unam Deum

Are You in Position?

St. John 15:9-17

With every election, from the PTA to the presidential, there are appointments to positions of authority. As we have experienced in this past presidential election, ‘special appointments’ are given to those who have been the most supportive during the election process.

History reveals that this procedure is somewhat successful, but the appointees are usually ordinary at best. High accomplishment depends on whether the nominee's experience fits the requirements of the position. President Jimmy Carter choose his friend Earl Butts to be his Secretary of Agriculture. Since Mr. Butts had a history in farming, he appeared to be a good fit for the appointed position. He lost credibility, however, when he spoke of the invasion of fire ants in the U.S.

On National television he talked about the problem, sharing information, which was a good thing. If you have experience with fire ants, you understand that it is wise to do everything in your power to dodge the pain of an encounter with their anger. His credibility was hurt, when he placed his hand and arm into an aquarium filled with fire ants, and stirred the dirt mounds, expecting small nibble-like bites. Instead, as programmed by God and in protecting their turf, the ants did what they were expected to do. There was chaos on the stage.

With each appointment to a position, even with perfect matching, there is a risk of failure and pain from fulfilling our obligations. In St. John 15:16-17, Jesus assigns an important position. He appoints his disciples, those who both love and follow him, and you and me, to the top most appointment in the Church. Jesus says, *"I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last so that the Father will give*

you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

Jesus uttered these words immediately after he had assured his followers that they were his friends. He does not use the term 'servant' because in most cases a servant does not know what his master's plans are. Rather, Jesus call is from God the Father. All of this was a segue to their appointment to a life of love.

I find it fascinating that Jesus chooses his followers to love others and to do acts of mercy to others. But he adds a caveat, a warning, to love yourself through the gift of Jesus. *"That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."*

I think Jesus was encouraging his followers to discover joy in themselves and to love their mind, body, and soul so that they may love others. Many of us find warmth in our accomplishment and our gifts to church and community. It is, however, the nature of humanity to explain to God why we cannot fulfill the requirements of our appointment from Jesus. When we continue to say we cannot meet the expectation of our assignment we are sure to fail.

Jesus is our example of success. But, again, we often say, *"There was only one Jesus."* Or, *"I can never be Christ-like, I am just not worthy."* Or, just fill in the blank, expressing your seeming inability to fulfill your appointment from Jesus.

It's almost back to school time! One of my favorite back-to-school stories came a from Pennsylvania mother, Susan Moser. A few weeks into the new school year, Susan asked her son what he thought of first grade. With enthusiasm, he replied, *"Oh, I love school. It's great!"*

Then he paused, and added: *"Except for one thing -- I don't really like it when Mrs. Decker tries to teach us stuff."*

It is reported that Henry Ford said: "*Whether you think you can or you think you can't, either way, you are right.*" We also need to accept our appointment with the belief that "*I can endure all things through the power of the One who gives me strength.*" (Philippian 4:13) We accept our ministry with gratitude toward God. When we take our Godly task with the attitude of thanksgiving and maintain faith in God, we will be both successful and fulfilled.

I believe that God expects us to assume a sensible approach to our appointment: to first love ourselves, so that we may love others, and show mercy in the things we do. We must also understand the signs that we may have caused pain to others and ourselves. God expects that we will not put our hands into the fiery stings of failing to serve.

The day is December 11, 1979: in Oslo, Norway, an Albanian nun named Teresa, who has dedicated her life to live a simple life of love among the world's poorest and most desperate people, receives one of the world's most significant awards – the Nobel Peace Prize. As part of the proceedings, she had the opportunity to speak, and here is one of the things she said:

Jesus "insisted that we love one another as he loves each one of us. And we read that in the Gospel very clearly - love as I have loved you - as I love you - as the Father has loved me, I love you - and the harder the Father loved him, he gave him to us, and how much we love one another, we, too, must give each other until it hurts. It is not enough for us to say: I love God, but I do not love my neighbor. St. John says you are a liar if you say you love God and you don't love your neighbor. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live. And so this is very important for us to realize that love, to be true, has to hurt. It hurt Jesus to love us, it hurt him. And to make sure we remember his great love he made himself the bread of life to satisfy our hunger for his love. Our hunger for God, because we have been created for that love. We have been created in his image. We have been created to love and be loved, and then he has become man to make it possible for us to love as he loved us. He makes himself the hungry one - the naked one - the

*homeless one - the sick one - the one in prison - the lonely one - the unwanted one
- and he says: You did it to me. Hungry for our love, and this is the hunger of our
poor people. This is the hunger that you and I must find..."*

This beautiful metaphor of the vine and the branches in St. John 15:1-6 reminds us that Jesus will always be with us. It is also a symbol of the Christian life with "Followers of the Way" intertwined with God in the community of faith. Are we ready? Alleluia. Amen.