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**The Quiet Workers of God
Exodus 31:1-7; Romans 16; Luke 8:1-3
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Often times when I read the Bible, I come across names of people I can't pronounce or they seem unimportant. So, I skim over their names because they are forgettable. However, there are no unimportant people to God. If their names are in scripture, there must be a reason. Perhaps we can learn from them.

We begin with names of two men, which are hard to remember and difficult to say: Bezalel and Oholiab (o-HO-ly-ab). Already, your eyes are beginning to glaze over. But I promise you that these 2 men and others like them have something to say to you and me.

Before we read God's word, before we read about Bezalel and Oholiab, let us pray. Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

The context of our scripture passage: the Israelites have been rescued from slavery and they are traveling in the wilderness. God says to Moses, "I want you to build me a sanctuary so I will dwell among you. This sanctuary will be called a tabernacle and I want you to build it exactly as I say" (Exodus 25:8-9).

God goes on for 6 chapters explaining everything in great detail. Our Creative God gives dimensions, kinds of wood, what kind of metals to use, how to make the walls and ceiling and furniture, right down to how to make the clothes for the priests, no detail is left out.

God expects Moses to follow every detail. If I was Moses I would be overwhelmed! Not only is Moses leading these hundreds of thousands of people

in the wilderness, now he must make sure a portable sanctuary is built exactly the way God wants it.

However, after God gives all these instructions, God lets Moses in on a little secret. We now come to our first scripture passage: Exodus 31:1-7.

Did you see what God did? God took two individuals and gifted them to do what needed to be done...along with many other workers. God had anointed Bezalel and Oholiab to work with their hands. They were gifted for manual labor and craftsmanship, and then God called them to build the Tabernacle. This was to be their ministry. As a result, Moses was able to continue doing what God had called him to do which was to be a leader to the Israelites.

Bezalel's name means "under God's shadow" He never became the great statesman and organizer that Moses did. His voice was never heard to preach to the people. God needed people like Moses; but also needed people like Bezalel. The work the Lord called him to do was of such importance that God gave Bezalel and his workers a special anointing for the task, the task which was just as important as the task of Moses.

I call Bezalel and Oholiab quiet workers of God. After this sermon, you probably will not remember their names (let alone pronounce them). But God does. You will remember Moses' name because he is the upfront guy who gets all the glory. But God also glorified Bezalel and Oholiab, and their names are forever in scripture.

Ministries and churches don't go far without behind-the-scene workers. Let me show you another example: Romans 16. I have just a few verses listed in your bulletin, but if you have a Bible with you, or you can use one of ours in the pew rack in front of you, or do this when you get home, take a look at all of Romans 16. There you will find a list of names.

The Apostle Paul, who is writing Romans, is concluding his letter. In this last chapter, he gives 27 names. For most of us, it becomes boring reading and seemingly seems unimportant and redundant. But you should know by now, they

are not! Paul is listing the quiet workers of God, the ones who work behind the scenes. Most names you will forget, but they are important to Paul and to the Lord.

There is Phoebe, a woman, who carries the finished letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul calls her a servant and a great help to many people.

There is Mary and Tryphena and Tryphosa and Persis...all women who worked very hard in the Lord, Paul says.

There is Rufus' mother who became like a mother to Paul.

Look at your bulletin as I read Romans 16:22-23.

There is Tertius who wrote the letter of Romans as Paul dictated to him. Paul had poor eye sight and he used Tertius as a scribe. Talk about behind the scenes work. How about Gaius? He opened his house to the church by using his gift of hospitality.

A little side note here: there are so many names in our scripture passages today that I didn't know how to pronounce, that I found an app called "Bible Audio Pronunciations," and I immediately downloaded onto my iPhone and iPad. I used it a lot yesterday!

Ministries and churches don't go far without behind-the-scene workers, just like the ones Paul names; people given gifts of writing, hospitality, service, helps. Names you will not remember after today, but God does. (And by the way, not one preacher is mentioned in Romans 16.)

All of them used their gifts *in the Lord*. Over and over again Paul states how they worked hard *in the Lord*, they were fellow workers *in Christ*, they were chosen *in the Lord*. God honors them by giving us their names.

One more example. In your bulletin: Luke 8:1-3. Read.

We forget as Jesus traveled and ministered, he needed to eat, he needed places to rest, he needed shelter, he needed clothes. These woman listed here did that for him. They provided for him out of their own means. The list includes two names you only find here: Joanna and Susanna. Two women gifted with financial means to help Jesus in his ministry. And noted by God.

Scripture teaches us that God has given each one of us a gift or two (we call them Spiritual Gifts because they are given by the HS) to use in the service of the church, in Christ, in the Lord. Most of them are behind the scenes gifts. Here are some of them: administration, craftsmanship, encouragement, discernment, giving, helps, hospitality, prayer, mercy, pastoral care.

In the past, I have taught classes on spiritual gifts, where we learn more about them, finding out what your gift is, and how and where to use it. I have learned that most people have the behind the scenes gifts. My classes were filled with helpers and servants, and just a few with leadership or teaching. The behind-the-scene gifts are needed...lots of them.

Look at the question I have listed on the bottom of the sermon notes: What gift has God given to you to serve Jesus? If you don't know how to answer that question or are unsure, we are right now offering a class on spiritual gifts taught by Eloise Fredrickson, who has the gift of teaching. It starts this Thursday at 10 a.m. and more information is in your bulletin. I encourage you to take this class...it's a fun one as you discover what God has given you.

I end with two more modern day examples: one from a famous person, one here at Valley Church.

During World War II, many of England's coal miners wanted to enlist and fight on the front lines. Winston Churchill acknowledged their patriotism but reminded them of how valuable their work was to the cause of the war. "Some must stay in the pits," he said, "and others must stay in the army. Both are equally needed, and for both there is equal credit."

Here is an example at this church: We have a lot of memorials here, and it takes a lot of people to pull one off. There is the office staff who design and print the bulletin, and on the phone contacting all the workers. There are greeters at the door and at the guest book. There are ushers handing out bulletins and seating people. There are people in the kitchen preparing food and beverages for the reception, and then serve the people as they come out of the memorial.

We pastors cannot do these memorials without these quiet workers of God. I thank you for using your gifts to serve in this way. You may not get the accolades from the family, but God notices you.

For all of you behind-the-scene workers, God recognizes your work even if most of it is not noticed or recognized. God shows us this through Bezalal and Oholiab, gifted with craftsmanship, the importance of manual labor. Paul's list in Romans of all the quiet workers that were important and loved by him, shows how essential their work was to the early church. And then, there is the listing of the woman whose financial help was so important to Jesus.

I encourage you to look deep within your hearts and see what gift you have to offer in the service of the Lord. Each one of us is gifted. Let us use it in Christ.

The Apostle Paul says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Amen.