

“What’s in Your Resume?”
16th Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday
Exodus 20 1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Philippians 3:4b-14

Anyone who has applied for a job knows the importance, and the challenge, of writing a good resume. The resume, as most of us know, is the one or two page summary of our work and life experience. If you are applying for a new job, the resume tells the person doing the hiring what you’ve done in the past that makes you qualified for the job you are seeking. A good one will get you an interview. A bad one will get you a rewrite.

There are thousands of websites that will tell you just how vital a good resume is in any job search. Here’s a quote from one of them:

Never underestimate the importance of a good resume. It can mean the difference between getting or not getting an interview and, subsequently, the job you want. Your resume is your foot in the door; it is your representative before you get there.ⁱ

In other words, a resume provides proof of our qualifications. It establishes our *bona fides*—a Latin term meaning the evidence for our qualifications and accomplishments.ⁱⁱ

So it is well worth our time and energy to make sure we have a good resume prepared when we start a new job search.

If anyone doubts the value of a good resume, take a moment and re-read today’s lesson from Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi. In verses 5 and 6, Paul lists everything he did when he was a faithful Jew—before he met Jesus—all the things he once believed made him acceptable before God.

Why Paul make this list?

He made it because of an argument he was having with some people in the early church. Some of the Christians in the church were Jews before they accepted Jesus as the Messiah. This group wanted to make the people who were not Jews before they accepted Christ—people called Gentiles—obey certain parts of the Jewish Law. The Christians who used to be Jews wanted the Christians who weren't Jews before to follow the Jewish laws against eating certain kinds of foods and to be circumcised. **Essentially, these Jewish-Christians were saying: If you want to become a Christian, you have to be Jewish first.**

Paul, of course, disagreed. He believed that faith in Christ was all a person needed to become a Christian. Nothing else was necessary because Jesus established faith in God as the only membership requirement for God's Kingdom.

In addition, implementing some of these laws would set up barriers between different groups of people within the church. It would exclude some people from the community who could not (or would not) follow the Jewish laws in order to become Christians.

So to argue against these formerly Jewish Christians, Paul first had to prove his qualifications. He had to provide his *bona fides*, in other words, so he could say: "Okay. You think you were a good Jew and now have the right to make these demands? Well, listen to this."

And then, Paul ticked off the qualifications he had as a faithful Jew. Another translation (which reads even more like a resume) puts Paul's words like this:

- Circumcised? On the eighth day.
- Race? Israelite.
- Tribe? Benjamin.

- Descent? Hebrew through and through.
- Torah observance? A Pharisee. (A faction that tried to implement a pure form of the Jewish faith).
- Zealous? I persecuted the church!
- Official status under the law? Blameless.ⁱⁱⁱ

Now those are *bona fides*!

Paul used them to say no one was more qualified than himself to speak on this question. You couldn't find a better example of a pious first century Jew than Paul of Tarsus. He had punched all the right tickets under the Law. No one had more gains under the Law than Paul.

So what does Paul say next about his accomplishments under the Law?

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

And again:

More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

And once more:

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him...

It sounds like Paul just tore up his old resume, doesn't it? He counted everything that came before as a loss because knowing Christ was better than anything else there was. He said this to make a very important point: our own accomplishments do not make us acceptable to God. There is nothing we can do under any law that would impress God that much. God alone makes us acceptable by granting us grace through Jesus Christ. Don't rely on

your own works or any rules and regulations that put up barriers between you and God. Instead, develop a close relationship with God. “Be found in him,” as Paul puts it in Philippians 3:9. Elsewhere he said:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:19-20).

Paul’s idea of knowing God is not dry and uninteresting; it is not based on book learning and memorizing some teachings about God. This is a living, breathing relationship with a God who lives and moves in our daily lives.^{iv}

So we are moving from resume to relationship.

From our accomplishments to God’s grace.

- It’s not about us.
- It never was about us.
- It’s about who God is and what God has done for us in Christ.

The move from resume to relationship as the central feature of our life with God reminds me of some lyrics from a song by *Casting Crowns*. The song is “Who am I,” and the words go like this:

Not because of who I am
But because of what you’ve done
Not because of what I’ve done
But because of who you are^v.

From resume to relationship. Relationship, is the central feature of our life with God.

This is also the overarching meaning behind the 10 Commandments that we heard in this morning's reading from Exodus. These are not just good rules to live by. These rules were given to God's people to set up the framework for living in right relationship with God and with God's people.

It is all about relationship.

And as we think about our relationship with God, we have to think about the church. The church—the body of Christ—is vitally important to our understanding of who we are and who God is. Paul fought against the imposition of the Jewish laws because God gave him an inclusive understanding of God's people, not an exclusive one. We are one in Christ. Or as Paul put it in a verse from Galatians:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

It's all about relationship: Our relationship to God and our relationship to each other in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's especially important for us to remember this unity of the body of Christ today, which is World Communion Sunday. In a few moments, we will take part in Holy Communion. In doing so, we join together with Christians around the world and celebrate this sacrament as a symbol of our unity in Christ. When we come to God's table, we recognize and celebrate our relationship with God and with each other. This is absolutely key to sharing in God's life. Because when we come to God's table, we set aside that which divides us. Because in this sacrament, there is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free. There is no male or female.

In this sacrament we move from resume to relationship, to a place where we have only one identity: children of God.

Amen.

BENEDICTION: Be found in Christ! Live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us, and who lives in us this day and every day through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Go in peace. Amen.

ⁱ Paul S. Gerarde, Contributor, "Value of good resume can't be emphasized enough," *The Business Review*, August 7, 2000; article online, <http://www.bizjournals.com/albany/stories/2000/08/07/focus4.html>, accessed 25 September 2011.

ⁱⁱ "bona fides," Merriam-Webster Dictionary; article online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bona%20fides>, accessed 25 September 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tom Wright, *The New Testament for Everyone*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011), 440.

^{iv} Dr. Bill Long, "eyes on the Prize, Philippians 3:4b-14," 3 15/07, article on internet, <http://www.drbilllong.com/Lectioary/Phil34.html>, accessed 25 September 2011.

^v "Who am I?" *Casting Crowns*, 2003.