

**The Vicar Lesson**  
**Professor Steve Geiger**  
**Mark 9:28-29 & Acts 1:12-14**

This is an odd moment. Everyone in this room knows there's a piece of paper which holds your future. The paper is in this room. I'm a little closer to it than you are. Should I walk over and ask if we could just read the names right now? If he says no, try to grab the piece of paper? If I fail, you rush the stage, trying to get that piece of paper? Get the paper, and we bring the future into the present more quickly than it otherwise would have arrived.

But you won't—I don't think!—and I won't. Your future, for now, will stay on the paper, and you will wait . . .

. . . but then you will know, and your on-the-ground training will begin in a whole new way.

It must have been kind of scary and quite embarrassing to be trainees on the “Sunday” when the supervising pastor disappeared and left you to handle everything. Something shows up that you don't know what to do with. But that is only part of the problem. This thing you don't know how to deal with is playing out while a huge crowd is watching. But that is only part of the problem. There are very smart people who are taking you on, and with the large crowd watching. You, the trainee on a Sunday when your supervising pastor is out of town, confronted by a father with a son who is demon possessed. “Drive the demon out,” the father begs. You try. With everyone watching. With religious leaders—the scribes—challenging you. But it wasn't working. Were you scared? Did you wonder if you had failed the vicar test? Did you really wish, or not wish, that your bishop would show up again, and quick?

Lots of vicars. Probably nine. Trying to drive out a demon. Jesus with the other three on the Mount of Transfiguration. When the nine finally could talk to Jesus, in private . . . “What did we do wrong? What makes us bad vicars?”

You might remember the answer . . . what made them bad vicars.

But first, some time later . . . now, they were really left to themselves. Their supervising pastor had accepted a call. He left his vicars all by themselves to finish out the year. Well, actually, the rest of their lives. This time he had disappeared not simply up a mountain. He had ascended through the clouds. There was a theoretical piece of paper with their future written on it, composed in the script of God. There was work for them to do. But at that moment they had no idea what was on the piece of paper. They couldn't rush the stage. All they could do was wait in Jerusalem.

Wait. Waiting is evidence that each of us is small. Time—even time—is bigger than we are. We can't make the future the present. We can't control the future from this present. You don't know what learning experiences will play out during an upcoming 12 months. Yes, there's something on a piece of paper that you will find out tonight. But there's far more about the 12 months of your vicar year that you will be just as ignorant about when you put your heads on a pillow this night as you are right now.

Our lives unfold in stages. 11 other men were also stuck in a moment like this, where their future was unknown. But eight of those 11 had lived a particular moment which was similar, in a way. When it was also obvious that they were very small. When they had come face-to-face with the power of the devil,

and they had forgotten something. They had failed. They had been bad vicars. What had made them bad vicars? They had forgotten how much they depended.

Tonight you will be called by a group of Christians to represent Jesus in a very public way. You will be a disciple in training. It will be very easy to be a bad vicar. It will be very easy to think there's something about you worthy of honor. It will be very easy to think that when things go badly, since it all seems to depend on you, you have reason to give up. What went through the minds of the nine vicars when the father begs them to drive out the demon and they crash and burn? Had proud thoughts preceded their confusion? Did Jesus' ease at freeing that little boy from torture bring inner frustration--why couldn't I do that . . . I should be able to do that? What is clear is the mistake they made, a mistake that every one of us so easily repeats. "Jesus, why couldn't we drive out that demon?" Answer? "This kind is able to come out in no other way except through prayer."

We think we can do it ourselves. We look at ourselves, and we become either overconfident with pride or under-confident as if it all depended on us. Prayer is expressing dependence on another. Explained to nine vicars by a patient and loving supervising shepherd who knew--by experience--of what he was speaking. Jesus had chosen to depend on the Father, to humble himself so someone could express dependence properly. Dependence. Prayed. Prayed all night before selecting his 12 vicars. Prayed the night before crushing the head of Satan. Prayed as he hung on the cross and faced abandonment like none other. Prayed before he breathed his last. Prayed, and perfectly. Trusted purely. Depended completely. As a servant to disciples who hadn't always been good vicars. As a servant to you. Who won't always be good vicars. Who struggle, as do we all, to have calm dependent trust even in a moment when in just a few moments the piece of paper won't be hidden. Who can struggle with trust about months to come. Who can struggle with trust when the uncertainty of the future presses even more profoundly than you can now imagine.

Yes, we are weak, but what joy that the weak can lean on the strong. On the Lord, who loves you. Who ripped from the devil his right to accuse you of lack of calm, lack of trust, lack of dependence. Because Jesus did it right. And Jesus died right. You are forgiven. The 11 disciples were forgiven. Such love made them even more amazed at the God they could depend on. So, when Jesus did go up and left them depending, that was just fine. We are weak, we have no control, we depend. Of course! Need we rush the stage?

No. Instead, they calmly devoted themselves to the very thing they forgot when the devil had taken them on months before. They went to a house in Jerusalem and dedicated themselves to expressing their dependence, to confessing their confidence. They went to a house in Jerusalem and dedicated themselves to prayer.

Prayer. That's the vicar lesson. When you are small and God is great, you pray.

You will, and now we will.

*Dear Lord, We are all weak and you are all strength. Please send your Spirit to empower these men who tonight will be called by those who long to be blessed through them and are eager to be a blessing to them. Use your word to energize our vicars and to touch the hearts of those they teach. Give these young men, and those they love, peace as they continue to pray depending on you--tonight and then every night until a new day, the eternal day, dawns. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.*

Hear now God's word – from Mark 9:28-29 and Acts 1:12-14

Mark 9:28-29

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”  
29 He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

Acts 1:12-14

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer . . .