

“The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.” Of course the laborers were few. Anyone who has ever been in a volunteer organization knows the 80/20 rule: 20% of the people do 80% of the work. It’s true of parent-teacher groups, the Rotary Club, and probably the early Christian movement. And so the 12 sent out by Jesus to spread the good news of God’s kingdom were probably doing 80% of the mission work. There’s actually a name for this whole concept. It’s called the Pareto Principle, named for the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto.

It was Pareto who first noted the principle that 20% of our effort produces 80% of our results. And the rule seemingly extends into every aspect of our lives. 80% of the taxes are paid by 20% of the people. 20% of the roads cause 80% of the traffic. In basketball 80% of the scoring is done by 20% of the players. In business 80% of your problems will come from 20% of your clients.

Churches are no different. In congregations 20% of the parishioners do 80% of the work and 20% give 80% of the money. Not necessarily the *same* 20% but there’s often much overlap. The Pareto Principle isn’t always absolute, of course, but as a general rule of thumb, analysis shows it is often quite accurate.

And so it would be no surprise if the 12 apostles did 80% of the work helping Jesus spread the good news of the gospel. There were others of course. The Woman at the Well in John’s gospel did her share; as did the newly-healed Garasene Demoniac in Mark; and the man born blind in Luke. They all shared their stories after dramatic encounters with the healing power of Jesus. But chances are the 12 apostles did the bulk of the evangelical heavy lifting. And just as so often happens with volunteer leaders in churches, they probably grumbled about it and teetered on the brink of burnout.

It’s hardly a new problem. After leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses spent all his time settling disputes while everyone else just stood around. His father-in-law Jethro, perhaps noting the first evidence of clergy burnout in the Bible, declared to Moses, “What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.” And so, in response to Jethro’s advice, Moses appointed able men to help him govern the Israelites. Moses’ exclusive burden was relieved by this new shared circle of leadership. Who probably ended up doing 80% of the work.

At last week’s monthly Family Service I read Dr. Seuss’ classic book “Horton Hears a Who.” We then talked about a few of the spiritual themes: the idea of believing in something that you can’t see – the city of Whoville on the speck of dust and respecting the dignity of every human being – “A person’s a person no matter how small.” So maybe Horton was on my mind when I started thinking about this morning’s lessons. But Dr. Seuss’ *other* Horton book – “Horton Lays an Egg” – kept popping into my head. And I kept hearing that wonderful refrain, “I meant what I said and I said what I meant; an elephant’s faithful 100%.”

As Christians, being 100% faithful to God should always be our goal. When it comes to our faith lives, we must strive to break through the barrier of the 80/20 rule. There’s no “faith-o-meter”

which allows you to calculate your faithfulness. But in everyone's case it could probably stand to be upped a bit. Jesus wants *all* of us, not just a certain percentage. Which means you can't be a 20% Christian or even an 80% Christian. It's not good enough. Like Horton we need to strive to be "faithful 100%."

So while the Pareto Principal doesn't apply to our individual spiritual lives, it does apply to our communal life as the body of Christ at All Saints'. Think about ways in which you may be called to serve Jesus Christ in this community. It's not fair to sit around for an hour on the occasional Sunday morning and let 20% of our fellow brothers and sisters do all the work. It's a recipe for burnout for those carrying the load. So I challenge you to take up some of the work. Talk to me, talk to a vestry member about ways you can be more involved. Not because of institutional propagation but for your individual and our communal life of faith.

Take Sunday School at All Saints'. By all accounts we have a thriving program – a good number of kids, a strong curriculum, excellent and committed teachers. And yet while the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are indeed few. This past year we've had four teachers. And as a community of faith we can't expect these dedicated folks to carry the entire load. Not only is there a high potential for burnout, if they are always in the classroom there is no chance for our teachers to have a spiritual life and get something back after giving so much. So we either take seriously our commitment to sharing and passing on the faith to our children or we don't. The choice is ours to make. But unless this changes we're going to have to make some tough choices next year. And what would that say about our communal commitment to nurturing our children in the love of God? The good news is that we only need a few people to step up and assist with this ministry. Consider teaching even one Sunday a month. It will make a big difference in the lives of our children, in your own life, and help shatter that 80/20 rule.

Now I realize this whole concept of the 80/20 rule around here isn't entirely fair. There are people in church who come because they're seeking meaning; people who need healing and rest and comfort and solace; people who are taking a large leap of faith simply by walking through the doors of a church. Faith isn't always about doing; it is sometimes about simply being. And we need to create space for this. This place must be a sanctuary in the deepest sense of the word.

But there are still a lot of Christians sitting in churches each Sunday who come and go, and don't actually take part in what church is really about. An active faith is an engaged faith. And so this is about empowerment. Get involved, be challenged, and your faith will grow. And that is something I, like Horton, can guarantee 100%.