**Bezalel and Oholiab**

Last week I watched a show on the Discovery Channel that featured a state of the art fishing vessel in Alaska. The ship is 264 feet long and has a complex array of equipment to lower and raise nets, process and freeze fish along with the normal propulsion and steering systems associated with large vessels. The man in charge of the maintenance of the ship is responsible for all of the operating systems on board. He was shown attending to a variety of tasks, one minute trouble shooting the electronics of a winch then swapping out a leaking o ring on a bilge pump. He seems to be the right man for his job as few people possess the wide range of skills necessary to maintain such diverse equipment. I envy people like him who seem to have an innate ability how to figure out how things work from the simple to the complex (although those who work outside may envy my position as a banker enjoying a climate controlled environment). In chapter 31 of Exodus we are introduced to Bezalel whom God blessed with talent in multiple areas.

The chapter begins with God telling Moses that he had chosen Bezalel to craft much of the tabernacle and its furnishings. He was the grandson of Hur who may have been the same Hur who was a leader of the Israelites (see Ex. 17:11-12 and 24:14). Hur was from the tribe of Judah and Jewish tradition maintains that he was married to Miriam who was the sister of Moses and Aaron although there is no biblical evidence to support that. Some believe that Hur participated in the creation of the infamous golden calf while others believe that he killed while trying to prevent it. While Moses was given all the specific instructions for the tabernacle and its furnishings, he must have wondered who would have the skill to oversee all the work necessary for its completion. As always God provides what is necessary to accomplish His will. In verse 3 we read that He filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God and with skill, ability and knowledge in a wide variety of areas and that he was qualified in all kinds of craftsmanship. God also appointed Oholiab to assist Bezalel and gave skill to the other craftsmen who would do the work. God provided the skill necessary for every detail from the preparation of lumber down to the intricate engraving of the stones on Aaron’s breastpiece. God re-emphasized that Moses was to make sure that everything was made just as He commanded.

God then repeated His requirement that the Sabbath must be kept holy. The Israelites were about to engage in a major project requiring much work by many artisans. God made sure that they knew that regardless of the importance of the tabernacle, this was a planned project and they had to allow for the observance of the Sabbath throughout its completion (God does make allowances for unforeseen exigencies, see Luke 14:1-5 and Mark 2:23-27). In Exodus alone there are references to keeping the Sabbath holy in chapters 16, 20, 21, 23, 31, 34 and 35 so we must recognize its importance to God. The chapter ends with God giving Moses the two stone tablets containing the testimony.

I think there are few lessons in this chapter for us regarding the work we do for God. The talent and skill God bestowed on Bezalel are separate and apart from the spiritual gifts he gives to His children. Notice that God first filled him with the Holy Spirit. While God will sometimes use non believers to accomplish his purposes, I think that a holy calling such as the tabernacle is reserved for believers. Bezalel had to be receptive to God’s calling. While skills are not enumerated with spiritual gifts, they can be used to serve God if we make them available. Notice that God gave Bezalel skills to accomplish a specific task. Our skills may or may not be of use to God for something he wants accomplished and being in fellowship with God can help us discern His will better. We also see that Bezalel had an accountability partner in Oholiab. Jesus recognized that two together can accomplish much more than the sum of their separate work and so he sent His disciples out in pairs. Finally, we see that Bezalel and Oholiab were given the ability to teach their skills to others (see 35:34). The undertaking of the tabernacle was a big project that could not be accomplished by two men. They needed to rely on others to do much of the work. In the church today, all hands are needed on deck to attend to the ministries with which God has entrusted us. We can accomplish much more together than individually and we need to nurture the spiritual gifts our younger brothers and sisters possess and pass on the skills that we possess.