

“You Do It” Matthew 14:13-20 August 9, 2020 Pat Weatherwax

Now when Jesus heard this (that John the Baptist had been assassinated) he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Holy words, holy wisdom. Thanks be to God

INTRODUCTION

An ancient teacher of spiritual wisdom wrote:

Past the seeker as he prayed came the crippled and the beggar and the beaten. And seeing them...the seeker cried, "Great God, how is it that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them?" ...God said, "I did do something. I made you."

SHOULD AND OUGHT

A directive from Jesus presented to his disciples generally translates to a responsibility for us, as current day disciples. There were many hungry people. And in verse 16 Jesus said to his disciples: “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”

As a church, First Presyterian of Battle Creek does a great job, following Jesus’ directive to feed the hungry. Together we financially

support the Crop Walk, work with the Food Bank and Food Pantries. We serve food at the Salvation Army and have 16 different First Pres people assisting our Episcopalian siblings at St. Thomas breakfast program this week. Our PC (USA) denomination assists with aid, world-wide. Yea, church!

Do you personally get involved with helping the hungry? There are simple ways. The Food Bank of South Michigan, which serves our surrounding six counties, notes that:

One in six people struggle with hunger in South Michigan. (and)

“Because of generous donations like yours, the South Michigan Food Bank is able to offer 6.5 million meals every year. For each dollar you donate, the Food Bank can secure six meals for someone in need.”

Send them a dollar. YOU can do that. Christian *action*, doing helpful things in Christ’s name is important. In the first chapter of the book of James, Eugene Peterson style, we read:

Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. *Act* on what you hear! Those who hear and don’t act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life!—even out of the corner of his eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action. Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world (James 1:22-27 Message).

We are “called as partners in Christ’s service, called to ministries of grace” (Glory to God, Hymn # 761).

Take note, though. Christian action isn’t a simple, do it or don’t do it: Jesus also spoke against giving, motivated by the desire to look good to

others (Matthew 6:1). When we give, when we serve, we also need to check our motives.

GRACE

Because we can *never* do anything to *earn* God's grace and love.

Ephesians chapter 2:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NRSV)

So in our giving and our serving, called as partners in Christ's service, we look for balance and blessings. Grace leads to a life of gratitude.

In the brief account, from our main text, from the Gospel according to Matthew, (verses 13 and 14) Jesus exhibits self-care in his grief: "he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself". He took some alone time. Then he showed care for others: "he had compassion for them and cured their sick". He made sure that "all ate and were filled".

So today if I preach to you "Be sure to care for others" it doesn't mean "neglect yourself, so you can give, give, give to others". That's why we read in context, why we consider both/and, not either/or.

That's why we read the book of James with its emphasis on good works *and* the letter to the Ephesians, that it's all about God's grace. That's why we read Genesis and the stories of the patriarch Abraham, whom God said was "blessed in order to be a blessing to others" (Genesis 18:18). That's why we trust the words of 2 Corinthians (1:4) that implores us to "share compassion as God has had compassion on us".

Benevolence means "You Do It". Do kind things for others and for yourself, you are a beloved child of God.

SUMMATION

A modern day teacher of spiritual wisdom wrote:

When you look at another human being and fail to see a beloved sister or brother, there will always be a 'them' and an 'us'.
(Heather McLoskey Beck)

What could our world be if we saw absolutely everyone, not just a brother or sister, but as a *beloved* one?

We are becoming more and more aware that there is one race, the human race, all people made in the image of God, the one creator of humankind. Why do we routinely see us and them? What's that about? May we ask God to give us the answer, *and* the strength to do what it takes to become one human family.

Heather McLoskey Beck, who wrote that pithy "us and them" quote suggests we *all* need to find out what our life's purpose is. She writes:

There's nothing more important than figuring out what makes your heart sing and doing that- every day.

It's never too late to ask what God wants you to do with your life. Today, tomorrow, for the rest of your days. The prophet Isaiah sums it up for us:

You shall call, and the Lord will answer;
 you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
 If you remove the yoke from among you,
 the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
 if you offer your food to the hungry
 and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
 then your light shall rise in the darkness
 and your gloom be like the noonday.
 The Lord will guide you continually,
 and satisfy your needs in parched places,
 and make your bones strong;
 and you shall be like a watered garden,
 like a spring of water,
 whose waters never fail. (Isaiah 58:9-11,
 NRSV)

This is the Word of the LORD, for us today. Thanks be to God!

Triune God, thank you for caring about our earthly needs. Help us to care about others' needs. Thank you for the generosity of First Presbyterian Church in caring for our community, and all your churches that care for others, world-wide. Help us each to follow your instructions and example. Amen