

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, September 11, 2022

“God's Work Our Hands Sunday”

As a pastor, I hate to admit this, but I have always had a complicated relationship with God's Work Our Hand's Day. I love the fact that we are organizing to do mission work on this day in the ELCA and I love our projects. But shouldn't every day God's Work Our Hands Day?

It sort of reminds me of Valentine's Day. You have heard it said that Valentine's Day is a 24/7, 365 day a year thing when you are in a committed relationship? I say this to Jeranna, especially when I forget to buy her some chocolates on Valentine's Day. “Honey, every day is Valentine's Day.”

As Christians, every day is an opportunity to serve, no matter how young or old you are. God spots us up, like a jump shot in basketball, with a chance to use our hands, feet, or words and brains to serve one another. And yet, how often do we miss the pass or assume someone else will do it?

In our lessons for today, each lesson is about having a change of heart or mind about something. As I have struggled with God's Work Our Hands Day at times, I still think it is worthwhile.

The churchy word for this idea of a change of heart or mind is repentance. In the New Testament, “repentance” comes from the Greek word metanoia. Meta, also the name of the umbrella company for Facebook, means change. “Noia” means to think. Metanoia means to change one's mind... to expand it in such a way as to have a new perspective on the world or one's self.

It can also mean to turn around. So if you are heading down a certain path that is destructive, or you have a broken heart over something you have done or left undone, you can repent... change your ways, change your mind, turn things around. God offers grace upon grace to you. All can be forgiven.

For example, in our Psalm for the day, Psalm 51, King David becomes aware through the prophet Nathan of his sinful behavior and repents. He was lusting over Bathsheba while she was bathing on the

roof and hatched a plan to steal her from her husband, Uriah. David had Uriah killed on the front lines of battle, then took Bathsheba as his wife. Nathan called David out on his actions. In the Psalm David, one of Israel's greatest kings, prays to God according to God's steadfast love for forgiveness and for God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him. Without the prophet Nathan holding him accountable, would David have repented, changed his mind about his actions? We need truth tellers in our lives.

In our 2nd reading, the Apostle Paul confesses that he acted out of ignorance as a blasphemer and persecutor of Christians, a man of violence. He says, "But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul who became Paul had a change of mind about Jesus and his direction in life. He repented from his past actions of violence and became a missionary for Christ to the Gentiles. Now he is overflowing with the love of Jesus because of the grace he received.

Finally in our Gospel from Luke 15, Jesus is getting called out again by the religious leaders for eating with sinners and tax collectors. Then Jesus tells 3 parables about being lost and found. We get two lost and found parables today: the lost sheep and lost coin.

Jesus speaks to the Pharisees and Scribes about the importance of going after that one lost sheep while leaving the 99 behind. Then when the shepherd finds that sheep, he puts it on his shoulders, calls his friends and celebrates in that one lost sheep being found. Jesus concludes, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

With the lost coin, when becoming aware of the lost coin, the woman searches tirelessly for it. And when she finds it, she rejoices and calls her neighbors, and invites them to come and celebrate with her. Her celebration probably cost more than the coin was worth.

Our God is like that shepherd who leaves the 99 and tirelessly searches for that one lost sheep and the woman who searches for her

precious treasure deep into the night. Jesus work on the cross reminds us that God will never give up on us.

For us, do you find yourself in the company of the 99 righteous persons who need no repentance? Or are you the lost sheep? We need to realize that as humans, we are simultaneously lost and found. If God can forgive adulterers and murderers like David and Paul who repent, God will forgive us too.

I had a wise professor once say to me whenever I was struggling with doubt in my first call as a pastor, “Jon, when in doubt, get out.” In other words, if you are ever struggling with your faith or your purpose, then get out and visit a saint, serve a neighbor in need, listen to a person’s story who is struggling, do an act of justice for someone.

In that encounter God will meet you and remind you that you are loved and called to keep on keeping on.

Amen