3-15-20 Here I Am, Lord, Send Me Rev. Amy Haines

Josh 24:14-15, Eph 2:8-10 Lent- Walking with Jesus

Online Worship

This past week I held children’s church with our students here at Bright Beginnings Christian Preschool. Each month they learn a different Bible verse and fruit of the Spirit, and this month’s verse is from Mark 12:31 “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” This month they have welcomed community helpers such as first responders and medical personnel, learning from those who serve all our neighbors.

How appropriate, with all that has happened this week, to give thanks for and pray for those who serve others, while thinking of ways we can serve and love and care for one another.

Along with you, I have experienced the roller coaster of this week, as plans changed by the hour, especially on Wednesday and Thursday. I am thankful that we can meet online this morning.

While our schedules and procedures and locations have changed, at least temporarily,

we still follow a God who loves us, who cares for us, and who invites us to journey with Jesus.

We are still called by God to be the church, even in uncertain times, called to love God and love neighbor in intentional and practical ways.

As we continue in this season of the church year called Lent, our scriptures invite us to grow in love with God through holy habits that strengthen our walk with Jesus. For when we strengthen our walk with Jesus, we then better respond to God in word and action, in living with God and living for God.

Over the past two weeks, we have reflected on the holy habits of worship, prayer and the study of scripture. These holy habits, these spiritual practices, are not new. They are illustrated throughout Scripture. Jesus lived by them. And they have been foundational for God’s people throughout many generations.

As we find ourselves navigating a new world this week, these holy habits of worship, prayer and scripture ground us to live by faith, not fear. To trust the promises of God, and the presence of God. Then, when we live by faith, we are called to respond to God’s presence with our service,

to God’s love with our love, to God’s grace with our care for one another.

As Paul proclaimed to the church in Ephesus, we are created for this purpose! We are created for good works, to serve one another as a way of life. We are not to do good things as a ticket into heaven but as a response to the gift of God’s saving grace in our lives.

So as we continue our Lenten journeys, walking with Jesus, we are called to cultivate this holy habit of service.

The words “serve,” “serving,” “service” and “servant” appear over 1000 times in the Bible. And most often in Scripture we learn that we are the servants of God.

-Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 3: Serve p.66

While we like to think we are independent individuals minding our own business, we have to recognize that in reality we were created to be in community, serving and supporting each other.

As sons and daughters of God, made in the image of God, claimed by God’s love, we are to reflect together God’s love and God’s ways through our words and actions.

One of the reasons I cherish our United Methodist connection is that it reminds me we can do so much more together than as individual households or individual churches. Supporting UMCOR worldwide and locally in response to natural disasters, supporting Wings of the Morning in the Congo, supporting health clinics in Mexico, and now learning from each other how to do online worship and partnering with others to offer food boxes to our community,

together we are the body of Christ in the world.

As members of the body of Christ, we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ. We are called to embody God’s ways of love and hope, of justice and community, of kindness and care.

Think of the ways you have served already this year. Providing a meal at The Gathering in Middletown. Packing food with Food for the Hungry. Donating seeds and money for Easter meals. Supporting the Senior High Summer Mission Trip. Volunteering with Adult New Readers or local non-profits. Allowing space for the preschool and scouts and grief groups.

To be a follower of Jesus is to love God and love neighbor. Those neighbors nearby as well as those neighbors far away. We cannot be authentic to our faith without loving both.

Yet, over the years, I have known Christians who believe that God only wants them to go to church, pray on occasion, read their Bibles, and refrain from doing evil. They believe all that matters is saying yes to following Jesus.

While a relationship with Jesus is foundational to our faith, living by faith is the call and invitation of Scripture. As Micah 6 reminded us earlier this year, we are to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. (6:8) 1 John says bluntly, “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” “If God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other.” (4:8, 11)

We are to love both God and our neighbor.

This love is not a feeling, not an emotion, but a way of living and being.

When Jesus died on the cross, he was a suffering servant giving himself to redeem the world.

He didn’t just say I love you, he gave his life out of love for you and I! And while hanging on the cross out of love for the world, Jesus also spent some of his final breath caring for his mother.

Jesus linked his mother and John so that she was claimed and cared for in a society that neglected widows. Jesus’ love was a way of living and being, until his final breath.

Consider the ways you have loved your neighbor this week. Or consider the ways neighbors have been kind to you this week.

The Hebrew word that we translate as “kindness” is *hesed*. It appears over 240 times in the Hebrew Bible, sometimes translated as kindness, sometimes as mercy, sometimes as steadfast or covenant love, often used to describe God’s love for humanity. It is also used to describe an act of goodness the recipient has no right to expect—undeserved kindness—which is also one way to define the word “grace.”

-Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 3: Serve p. 74 adapted

Do you remember years ago when we were all invited to practice random acts of kindness?

I like better the invitation of Rev. Adam Hamilton—practice intentional kindness.

As he has stated:

I may struggle to see how I can have a significant impact on the injustice of the world, but every day, in multiple ways, I can make kindness my aim. It’s not difficult to practice kindness every day. But it does require intentionality, determination, and practice. We talk about spiritual practices because we want to make them habits, but also because in order for them to become regular parts of our lives, we must practice them the way that great athletes or concert pianists practice their skills.

-Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 3: Serve p.74

Acts of kindness—the way we are meant to care for each other on a daily basis—don’t necessarily involve work that is difficult or complicated. Sometimes, it can be as simple as

paying attention to those around you, making eye contact, and offering a smile.

-Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 3: Serve p.79

As social distancing suddenly becomes our new normal, consider ways we can still serve God through intentional kindness.

\*Be patient with yourself and others

\*Offer a smile

\*Contact a friend via phone or text each day. Ask how they are doing, then listen to their story, their emotions, their fears, and their faith

\*Celebrate on social media where you encounter God—in the kindness of others, in the beauty of nature, in the story of God’s word.

\*Be open to holy interruptions.

Sometimes the best way to serve God is to begin each day with the prayer, “Here I am, Lord, send me.” Then pay attention to what is happening around you and listen for God’s prompting to respond.

John Lennon put into lyrics, “Life is what happens while you’re busy making other plans.”

It’s true. Even in Jesus’ life, most of his ministry as recorded in the Gospels involved interruptions and Jesus’ willingness to drop everything else. Jesus noticed the people who needed help. He didn’t make excuses. He didn’t pretend not to see them. He saw the interruptions as divine appointments, and they became some of the most important moments in his ministry. -Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 3: Serve p.82

I confess this is something that I struggle with every day, allowing God to work through me through daily divine interruptions.

What would happen if every one of us was intentional to offer five acts of kindness each week?

Since our average attendance in 200 people, if each one of us would be kind or serve five times each week, we would intentionally reach out in the name of Jesus 52,000 times in one year!

Consider these practical ways to serve this week:

\*Intentionally check in on a neighbor or friend each day

\*Give online to our Easter meals or SCAC to help families in our school district stretch their dollars

\*If you are tech savvy, help someone set up ways to interact online or through their phone

\*If you are willing to shop, run an errand for a neighbor choosing to stay home

\*Volunteer to tutor a child or youth struggling with online homework

Think outside the box, pay attention to what is happening around you, and listen to God’s leading—you might find a new way to serve your neighbor!

We are not called to give in to panic, to live by fear, to isolate ourselves from the body of Christ in all ways. Rather, we are called to still be the body of Christ in this world, loving God and loving neighbor in new ways.

To follow God, to walk with Jesus, is an intentional choice. May we join our voices with Joshua and declare in word and action, “This day I choose to serve the Lord. This day I am open to following where Christ leads me. Here I am, Lord, send me!”

Let us pray.

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HYMNS on this day:

#374 Standing on the Promises

#581 Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service