

Sermon for September 13, 2020

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“God’S Work, Our Hands” Sunday is always an exciting Sunday. We gather projects from around the community and seek out opportunities to do God’s work. Today people from our congregation have already picked up kits and are coloring cards to go to children experiencing disaster through Lutheran Social Service’s Camp Noah. People are planting their seed bombs to support pollinators this fall and next spring. Kits invited people to join in Duluth’s Coastal Clean Up project on Sept. 26 and to read and reflect on August’s “Living Lutheran’s” call to action articles. Donations are being collected to support CHUM. Books are being purchased through EyeSeeMe online bookstore supporting the mission promoting positive images and stories about African American culture and history. Labyrinths are being crocheted to encourage our confirmation youth in their faith journeys. Prayers are being prayed, messages of hope are being chalked across driveways and neighbors are receiving Fall wreaths with caring notes. If you still need a kit, let us know. It is always encouraging to think about ELCA congregations across the country taking action in many and unique ways even in this pandemic year.

But while I always love “God’s Work, Our Hands” Sunday, it is also important to remember that the call to do God’s Work, with Our Hands is an everyday call, not just a once a year celebration. The hope for this day is to remind us, reenergize us and help us recommit to living this mission each and every day. So I have rewritten the motto to read “God’s Work, Our Hands Everyday”.

I also want to urge us to consider that we are called to do God’s Work with more than our Hands. While we are called to use our hands to bag up food, to color cards, to write message of hope, to croquet and quilt, to pick up our environment and plant for pollinators, God wants to engage more than our hands. God wants to work in and through our hearts, our minds, our mouths. God wants to open our ears, our eyes and lead our feet to follow. So I have rewritten the motto again to read “God’s Work, Our Everything, Everyday”.

The last hesitancy I have is that when we hear “God’s Work, Our Hands” we have the tendency to start thinking only about organized service projects and outreach organizations. Yes – we are called to support and join in doing the work of LSS,

CHUM, Second Harvest, Seafarers, Campus Ministry, Gospel Mission and so many more. But we do not need to wait for a service project to do *God's Work*. Every moment of your life is an opportunity for God to work.

We have been talking a lot about vocation and the priesthood of all believers in Seminary. When someone is asked what their vocation is, they most often respond by identifying their career, how they get a paycheck. To have a vocation in ministry therefore is often understood to mean you are a pastor, youth director, chaplain or otherwise church funded employee. Lutherans have a much fuller view of vocation. Luther believed that God can be active in and through any vocation for the good of neighbor and the world God loves. Therefore, if you are a shoemaker, you do the work of God with your hands, not because you put little crosses on the boots you make but because your neighbor needs good boots. If you are a housecleaner, you do God's work, not because you sing a hymn while cleaning but because others benefit from your work. Whether you are a front line worker or work out of a small home office, you are called to a vocation in which God can work in and through you for the good of the world.

Luther expanded this idea of vocation further. You not only have a vocation through your job, but you also have a vocation as parent, child, spouse, sibling, grandparent, neighbor, friend, student. And God is at work in and through you in all of these vocations. These are not secondary vocations. We are to see these vocations as central to living as God's people. Imagine recommitting to doing God's work everyday as parent, child, spouse, sibling, grandparent, neighbor, friend, student... There is no lack of opportunity. I have a t-shirt from one of our youth events with Feed My Starving Children that reads "Act locally to impact globally". I would challenge you to consider that "acting locally" begins in your own home, in your own family, in your yard and neighborhood.

And finally, let's stop thinking that all of God's work must happen in grand gestures. Yes- there are big things we hope and pray for and long to be a part of, but we are also called to small gestures that make a big difference for even one. Mother Teresa once said "*There are no great things, only small things with great love.*"

A few years ago songwriter Josh Wilson came out with a song called "Dream Small". The chorus sang "Dream small, Don't bother like you've gotta do it all,

Just let Jesus use you where you are, One day at a time, Live well, Loving God and others as yourself, Find little ways where only you can help, With His great love, A tiny rock can make a giant fall, Dream small."

So my final rewrite: "God's work, our everything, everyday, in all our vocations, locally and globally, in big and small ways". Or we could stick with "God's Work, Our Hands" and know the powerful call behind these four words.

I am struck by the selections for today's scripture readings and I want to send you this "God's Work, Our Hands" Sunday with the opportunities these texts present.

First we encounter Joseph, the boy that had been sold into slavery by his brothers, now a powerful man who holds their fate in his hands. Instead of revenge or last words, we read Joseph's words "So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones". The text tells us Joseph reassured his brothers and "speaks kindly" to them.

God's Work, Our Hands Opportunity: In your many varied vocations, where are you being called to choose reassurance over revenge? To whom will you "speak kindly" today?

Our second reading from Romans speaks of God's welcome to all people and asks "Who are you to pass judgement on your brothers and sisters?"

God's Work, Our Hands Opportunity: Do you find yourself feeling "judgey" today? Who are you passing judgement on? Instead choose to honor this day of the Lord and thank God, remembering that God is the Lord of all.

And then our Gospel reading: How many times must we forgive a member of the church who sins again us? And Jesus' words "Should you not have mercy as I have had mercy on you?"

God's Work, Our Hands Opportunity: Be people of mercy. Where will you extend mercy this day?

This week I heard a sermon by Dr. Nesson of Wartburg Seminary. He introduced us to theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's idea of the "Ministry of Bearing". Bonhoeffer quotes Galatians which reads: "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ," and goes on to say that the law of Christ is a law of bearing. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining. We are called to the ministry

of bearing with one another. Dr. Nesson went on saying we are called to bear with one another's oddities, shortcomings, putting up with others especially when it is difficult. To bear one another to the point of even finding joy in bearing with the other. Reassurance over revenge, speaking kindly, not passing judgement, showing mercy – the ministry of bearing.

God's Work, Our Hands OR "God's work, our everything, everyday, in all our vocations, locally and globally, in big and small ways" opportunity: Commit to the ministry of bearing.

Why? Because as our Psalm today reminds us: Lord you are full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love; you will not always accuse us, nor will you keep your anger forever. You have not dealt with us according to our sins nor repaid us according to our iniquities...you have compassion..." Forgiven and loved with such compassion, we are freed to be God's people living "God's Work, Our Hands".