

Here I Am, Lord, Send Me

March 22, 2020

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

We continue our series on Adam Hamilton's book "The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Faith." We've talked about the important of worship and prayer, being more intentional in our prayer lives, praying five times a day. We've talked about study, how important it is to listen to God's still, small voice and how to read scripture in a way that opens us to what God wants us to learn. This week, we turn to service.

All these practices have a community component. We gather in worship, we form groups to study scripture, and we work as a community to serve as we recently did making birthing kits to aid women in Sierra Leone. Of course, we are currently in circumstance that prevent us from gathering in community. The COVID-19 pandemic limits our social interaction as we work to contain the spread of this very contagious virus. That doesn't mean we aren't connected. We are bound together by the love of God and our love for one another. No virus can get in the way of that love. So we're doing the best we can. As you watch this message, imagine sitting here in our sanctuary, sitting in your usual spot. Imagine the faces of the people who are around you. Imagine the sound of music and the laughter of our kids. We are together in love and spirit.

So... service. It is an essential part of living out the Christian faith. The call to serve wasn't new to Jesus. It is a prominent message throughout the Old Testament. It was Joshua's call to the Israelites before he died: serve the Lord. Micah shared these words to teach what is pleasing to God: seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. The bottom line is this: God's way of assuring that His love is shared, and His will is done through the people He has called. And that includes us.

And why should we do that? Why should it matter? We can't earn God's love by doing good works, right? God's love, our salvation through Christ, are all given to us freely. In Hebrew the word *hessed* is often used. It means undeserved kindness. It is divine love that we don't have to earn, that we often feel we don't deserve. Still, God offers it. That's why grace is often described as undeserved kindness.

Because we are recipients of God's grace, we naturally respond by sharing it with others. We find ways of sharing our gifts, our talents, and our time here at church in acts of justice, mercy, and giving so that we can bring God's light into as many lives in as many places as we can. We do it as a church in shared ministries both local and global. And we do it individually by volunteering for local services and agencies. We support organizations that advocate for just laws and policies for the poor and marginalized.

When we serve, we are focused on the other. We are focused on what we can do to help others. And that's the right attitude. But study after study has proven that when we give, we get as much if not more in return. One study among MS patients were divided into two groups. The first group met with MS doctors learning how to manage their disease. Another group received a weekly call from another MS patient who served as a mentor to encourage and support

them. The study found that not only the patients receiving the support calls reported an increase in health but the mentor making the calls did as well. Giving encouragement was just as positive as receiving it.

Serving others is good for our health and well-being. It also helps to shape us spiritually. It makes us more like Christ. It's easier to be kind to others when we are in a kind mood. But honestly, it does more good for us when we're not in the mood to be kind.

When people come to me to talk about a difficult situation they are going through – a divorce, an illness, the death of a loved one – I encourage them to volunteer in the community. They look at me like I'm crazy. What good with that do? You'd be surprised. Giving of ourselves makes us more loving even when we're not feeling that loving.

Over the years I've had many tell me, "But pastor, I don't have much to give. I don't have any special gifts or talents. I don't have a lot of money to give. I just don't see how the act of one person can make a difference." Here's what I tell them: it's not so much about your *ability* as it is your *availability*. You must be willing to have your life interrupted. The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates this so well. The priest and the Levite couldn't be bothered to help the injured man. They were in a hurry. Or they were afraid. Jesus doesn't tell us why they

didn't stop to help. The Samaritan on the other hand was willing to have his life interrupted. He bandaged the man's wounds the best he could, he took him somewhere he could be nursed back to health. He made himself available. Did it save the world? No, but it saved one man's life. And that's pretty remarkable.

Here's the thing: the acts of one person might not save the world. But the acts of millions, touching one life at a time, is perhaps the only thing that will. I've challenged you in fives – pray five times a day, read five passages of scripture a day. Now I'm asking you to perform one act of kindness each day for five days each week. Imagine what a difference that could make. We usually have around 50 in worship each week. If 50 people perform five acts of kindness each week for 52 weeks, that's 250 acts of kindness each week and 13,000 acts of kindness each year! Imagine what that could do. Imagine the number of lives that would be touched, the amount of God's love that would be shared. Simple kindness is so undervalued in our society. And it's even more important today as we all live in a world of fear and anxiety. So practice five simple acts of kindness this week. Smile at someone. Thank the kid stocking shelves at the grocery store. Pray for the first responders and health workers and make a point of telling a nurse or police officer you know. When we're able to be together again, I want you to share your stories. What did you do? What reaction did you get? And how did it make you

feel? I bet you'll find it does as much or more for you than it did for your recipients. Open yourself to how God is guiding you to show kindness in simple ways. And act on it. Amen.