

“Do Good Works As Needed”

Rev. Dr. David Holyan

First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, June 3, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Mark 2:23-3:6

One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to You and to the power of Your Holy Spirit. I pray that You would take the words and images that each of us carry within, our worries and our celebrations. I pray that You would take the words we offer in song and in prayer, the words that we've heard read from scripture, and the words that you have laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless and transform all of these so that they might become the living word of Jesus Christ. And let that word do its work in us, among us, and through us, so that we might be a witness to Your grace, mercy, and peace, and love in this world so that those in need might find what they long for, so that the blessing that we know would be shared with others, so that they know too that they would be loved and welcomed by You. We ask all of this in the faithful name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A while ago a woman and her friend came to my office in the church. They wanted to share with me about a ministry that they were doing in North County to help homeless women or women who had been abused, who were struggling, who needed a safe place to hang out for a while, a place where they could learn life skills, seek the help that they need. All Among Us was the name of the place. I listened to their story, and as it kept rolling forward I was more, and more, and more convinced that this was a ministry that we needed to pay

attention to, a ministry that we needed to support. I don't often stand here and advocate for a ministry. I understand the privilege that I have of standing in the pulpit and the power that it represents. But I believe that this day I will get up on my soapbox. And I will preach to you because as I learned in raising money for the pipe organ, there's nothing greater than raising money when you have no stake in whether you say yes or no. In a sense, we raise money on behalf of Jesus Christ and those He wishes to serve. And so I want to invite you today to think about supporting this ministry that we've just heard about, All Among Us.

When I went online to learn more about the ministry after these two ladies left, I began to look at some of the stories that were there about the women that they serve. One of those stories touched me deeply. Not so much for the words that were there that talked about how the woman left an abusive marriage, or how she and her four children were scraping by, having enough money to pay the rent but no money to buy furniture or extras for birthdays or Christmas, how she found All Among Us and was given furniture and the help that she needed. The story is amazing, and there are many. But what touched me the most was the picture on the website. It terrified me and took me back to an earlier time. Just after I had been baptized as a Roman Catholic at Seattle University, I was involved in a prison ministry. Concerned Lifers was the name of it. We would go up to the state penitentiary and spend an evening inside the prison with those who had been given life sentences and had no chance of ever coming out. On the way to the prison I remember thinking, "I wonder what the person that I'm going to be partnered with will be like. Will I be afraid of them? Will they look mean and nasty? I wonder what they've done."

After walking through door, after door, after door that clanked behind, I was ushered into the gymnasium, invited to take a seat, and a young man came over and sat down opposite me. He looked like he could be my brother, a nice young man sitting opposite me who had done something horrible and would never get out. I don't really remember anything that man said, but I remember his face and the impact that it had upon me. So when I went to the website to find stories about All Among Us, what struck me was Marie's face and the picture of her sitting with her four kids on a sidewalk. She looked a lot like you and me, or maybe your children, or your grandchildren. You see, many of us have stories and realities that we don't ever want to be found out. They're too tragic, too hurtful. But she knew the reality that she was living in. An abusive marriage needed to end, and she found the courage to walk away. And what she didn't know is she would not be walking alone--that volunteers, the people who had felt God's love at work in their life, would come alongside her and help her and allow her to reclaim her life and to begin to trust again God's goodness for her and for others.

As many of you know, I pay attention to the little whispers of the Spirit every now and then, to the images and ideas and things that I see in nature that remind me that God is at work in our lives. I wear a stole that represents my call to ministry where I had a vision of weeds being turned into sunflowers. As a beam of light shined upon them, the weed would just, boom, pop into a sunflower. Again, and again, and again I watched as weeds became these amazing, beautiful flowers. I was stunned when I noticed the logo for All Among Us. It's an orange circle with a white flower in the middle of it. But it's not a sunflower. It's not even a flower. It's a dandelion with all the parachutes and seeds still attached ready for that puff of wind to take and carry them away. And I sat with that image for quite a while and noticed that at the very center of that image, where all the seeds are attached, all the parachutes out at the edge, the stem or stalk is coming up right at the very center, in the white color of the dandelion is a starburst, light coming at the very center of what is going on in that image. And I took that to mean hope bursting forth into a world that, all too often, we just want to get rid of or to eliminate or see as a nuisance. Not too many people look at a dandelion with its parachutes all ready to go and think, "Oh, that's amazing. Look at what God created there." I for one head for the Roundup. "I will get you before you fly away." But this morning I've had to learn to stop and pay attention and to see the beauty and goodness that is at work at the center of so many lives, even those, and especially those of homeless and

vulnerable women in our own community.

So I stand here and invite you to pray about supporting this ministry. You can do so directly. You can do so through the church. You can do so however you'd like. But as just a hint of how the Spirit might continue to be at work and alive in our lives in this community today and every day, I want to read to you again the prayer of confession that I wrote over a year ago and that we read this day, given this reality that we are facing, given this opportunity that we are hearing about. Hear again what we prayed. God of compassion and care, You long for us to reach out to our neighbors in need. You long for us to feed the hungry and cure the sick. You long for all people to live in loving freedom, peace, and wholeness. Yet too often we withhold Your love, sometimes out of a sense of righteousness. We forget Your grace is free and extravagant. Forgive us our sin. Forgive us for all the ways we hold back, sometimes out of a sense of Christian duty. Help us be unrestrained. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.