

15th Sunday After Pentecost Reflection

Pr. Nicole Hanson-Lynn September 12-13, 2020

God's Work, Our Hands Sunday

Genesis 50:15-21

Psalms 103:1-13

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-53

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the giver and sustainer of our faith, the Holy Spirit.

When I moved here, one of the first things that many people asked me was, "We can still do God's Work, Our Hands Sunday with St. Paul's and St. John's, right?" This day has a history; for many people from both Salem and Zion, it is one of the fondest memories of the Christ Lutheran Parish.

This year was always going to be different. Even if we had been able to gather together and collaborate for this Sunday, it still would have been different. It still would have been a day of excitement, joy, and grief. How much more so with Covid-19 in the mix?

Our reading from Romans has words that are often used in funerals. Read the words in verses 7-9 again. "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

These are words of hope that come in the midst of a conversation addressing a community in division. Can I really be Christian in the midst of someone who is Christian differently? Can I accept their beliefs if they feel different convictions because of their faith? Can I accept that someone who votes differently is still a Christian?

Paul's words are not a blank disregard for the realities of life. He is not offering fluff to a community in grief; he is offering deep hope and responsibility. Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. Living to the Lord is giving up my control over my life; it's accepting that God is God, and I am not. Living to the Lord means that the greatest

commandment is not one of the ten, but the summary of the whole message Moses delivered to the Israelites: love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind (Matthew 22:37, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4). And the second is found in the very center of the Torah, the first five books in the Old Testament: love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39, quoting Leviticus 19:18). Living to the Lord means that I am not number one, that I am a part of the Body of Christ. Dying to the Lord means that when all my dreams have failed, when I am disappointed, when I am grieving, and when I face physical death, that I am not abandoned. That even Death does not separate us from God's love.

It's easy to hear all this, to hear "Body of Christ," as a list of things we can do to earn God's favor or to force God to act the way we want God to act. As if by fulfilling our end of the bargain, we can force God to answer our prayers the way we want, making God more of a genie than God, more of a slave to us than companion, parent, life-giver. But that's an attempt that we all make to try to wrest control of God for ourselves. Instead, this call to be the Body of Christ is to be messengers of God's kingdom, not our own. It is freedom to let go, to trust in the Word of God who became flesh, to actually trust that when God says, "I love you," God means it. To be so overcome by that love, that we can't help but share it with others.

We celebrate God's Work, Our Hands Sunday once a year. But it is meant to be a reminder of our baptismal calling that continues all year long. We are to be the Body of Christ, to live to the Lord, every single day. Today, we celebrate and remember this claim that God has made on our lives as Christians; that we do not live to ourselves and to our own wellbeing, but to love God and neighbor. Martin Luther wrote in his treatise, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," that "Worship is not 'for the sake of reward, temporal or eternal, but alone to the glory of God and the neighbor's good.'" Alone to the glory of God and the neighbor's good. The very act of worship is about dying to ourselves so that we live to the Christ who became flesh and died for us, the Christ who rose from the dead, the Christ who promises to be with us even to the end of the age. To see and celebrate the differences in the Body of Christ.

Announcements

Thank you to everyone continuing their financial support. Your stewardship and discipleship are faithful witnesses in this time.

We still are offering Bible studies with video conferencing and phone options. If you are interested in joining, please call either Salem (906) 932-1510 or Zion (906) 932-1320.

We will be making a Salem and Zion Advent devotional, with a reflection each day from members of the congregation. If you are interested in more information about how you can participate in writing a reflection or if you are interested in receiving the completed devotional, call our offices or contact Pr. Nicole with any questions!

On Sunday, for God's Work, Our Hands, we are going to try a drive-by parade for the local nursing homes. Meet us at Zion's parking lot at 1pm, and then we will travel together to Westgate, Gogebic Medical Center, Sky View, and Villa Maria before ending together at Salem's parking lot.

Peace be with you.