

To Serve in Love  
United Church of Broomfield  
January 14, 2024

1 Peter 4:8-11

<sup>8</sup> Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup> Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. <sup>11</sup> Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

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Volunteering and serving. It's today's theme because following today's worship service is our annual committee faire in which we reaffirm our servanthood through this church's ministries. Serving, volunteering, donating one's time and talents is ubiquitous throughout America and the world whether the motivation is religious or secular. We all have different causes we believe in and motivations for volunteering. I have trouble grasping, however, the motivation for some people's volunteer choices.

A few years ago, NASA advertised for volunteers for a study on how space flight affects healthy bodies. They recruited fit, healthy volunteers who matched the general physical profile of their astronauts. Then they asked these volunteers to spend 15 weeks in a hospital bed so they could measure how this bed-rest position affects human fitness and functioning. Fifteen weeks. Almost four months in a hospital bed. Most of us would be ready to climb the walls after two days. That sounds miserable. But studies like that are often a little weird.

A Swedish university recruited healthy young volunteers to eat four cupcakes every day for six weeks for a study on the effects of fat on the human body. The volunteers weren't supposed to change anything else about their health and fitness routines or their daily habits. Just eat four cupcakes a day for six weeks. I might be foolish enough to volunteer for this study, but I know I'd end up regretting it.

But that doesn't match what the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation in Hampden Township asked of their volunteers. They recruited a small group of volunteers to get drunk so their officers could get training in using the Standardized Field Sobriety Test.<sup>1</sup>

Several years ago an author named Shelley Jackson asked for volunteers to help her publish her latest short story. The story titled "Skin" was 2,095 words long and, according to The Associated Press, Jackson wanted to publish it by tattooing the story, one word at a time, on the skin of volunteers. Jackson tattooed the first word of the story on her own wrist. In a very short period of time, she had more than enough volunteers from all over the world who offered their bodies for her project.<sup>2</sup> The craziness that people volunteer to do or be a part of is well....crazy.

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<sup>1</sup> "10 Craziest Volunteer Projects" by Grace Murano, Oddee.com, December 6, 2013. [https://www.oddee.com/item\\_98794.aspx](https://www.oddee.com/item_98794.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Douglas, Associated Press, "Part of the story," The Daytona Beach *News Journal*, May 31, 2004, 1D.

So...stop and think about how a small group of volunteers spread the message and the mission of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to the whole world, while facing down persecution and poverty and beatings and imprisonment and cultural differences and language differences.

In the Gospel of Luke, it says, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'" (Luke 10:1-2). Only Jesus knew that he was heading toward his arrest, torture and crucifixion. Only he knew that this would be the end of his earthly mission. It was time to pass the torch to his followers, his disciples, so that they could carry his message and continue his mission. In this passage Jesus was saying, "We're shorthanded for this mission. You don't get it yet, but I'm sending you out to the ends of the earth. So, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers to help you." It was a critical moment when the disciples had to decide if they were willing to become apostles.

As disciples they followed Jesus and studied his teachings. Wisdom and humility were their arsenal. But as apostles, they would be sent out – they would be put into service and action. They would need to have power and passion. They would need to do the work of sharing the message and ministry of Jesus by caring, loving and serving others.

Our scripture reading today says, "Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever." If you sit in church each week and doubt the power of the Holy Spirit, if you sit in church each week and don't feel like you are being prepared for acts of mercy and justice and truth that are greater than you can accomplish in your own strength, if your worship and study isn't leading you to look for those within and beyond these church doors who need and deserve the Good News, then you are still a disciple, not an apostle. And you won't receive the power and authority and the vision and the presence of the spirit of the Living Christ inside of you.

We all have gifts from God. When we use and share those gifts through volunteering and servanthood, it honors and glorifies God because it is one way that we share the Good News. Sometimes, we aren't sure exactly what our gifts are. Other times, we're unsure of whether to use our gifts or not. Then, on occasion, we're hesitant to use our gifts because it's unclear if we're using them in the right place or at the right time. And lastly, there are times when our gifts don't seem to coincide with the need, so we don't step up thinking we have nothing to offer....when, in all honesty, it may be the perfect time to throw caution to the wind and maybe discover a new gift that we never knew we had.

That's' how I first began to work in children's ministries. I agreed to help do arts and crafts in church Sunday School, but when I arrived on that first Sunday morning I was introduced as one of the new teachers for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. I didn't volunteer to do that. I **wouldn't** volunteer to do that because I had never work with children before. I had never taught. I didn't know the material or lessons. YET – whether it was because I was begged, nagged or cajoled, I agreed to serve as a teacher. And it was the best thing I did because I learned that I enjoyed teaching the children and they seemed to like me, too. \*\*

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If you are ready to step into your calling as an apostle or if you need a reminder about how valuable your time and gifts are, focus on these three things:

### 1) PRAY:

When we are sent out to love and serve, we aren't alone. We are to "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers in his harvest field..." God will be with us and God will provide support, whether the resources are patience, humility, colleagues or actual materials. If we pray in the spirit, asking the Lord to work in and through us, then God will answer us. And we will be that answer.

We may end up learning, doing and experiencing far more than we ever could have imagined.

### 2) GO:

So often, simply showing-up is the most important thing that we can do. Just do it, as the Nike ad said. If you're not sure if you can help with the request, if you don't think you have anything to offer or if you're convinced that you're just going to be bored or dislike the work, the task or even the people ... just show up. Offer your presence. It may be boring and not your cup of tea, but at least you went and offered yourself. You learned from the experience WHILE providing a valuable need. But it may be far more interesting and fun that you had thought it could have been. Don't miss out because you're not willing to go.

Jesus was very specific in telling his apostles to go in his spirit, a spirit of peace. Christians have not always come in a spirit of peace. If we had, Christ's kingdom would already have come on earth as it is in heaven. It's important that when we show up, we have a heart of peace. It will guide us to do our best and maintain constant love for one another.

### 3) SHARE:

First we pray. Then we go. Lastly we share.

The kingdom of God is the world as it will be when God rules over all the world. It will be the kingdom of justice and the fullness of peace. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Let Your kingdom come, let Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," this is what he was referring to. For that to happen, we have to share our gifts with the world. We have to serve.

The birth of Jesus served as the starter's pistol that announced creation's race toward the fully realized kingdom of God when Jesus returns as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Until that day, we are called to announce the kingdom of God with our words and even more so with our lives. As apostles, part of our prayer should be to ask God to show us how we can contribute to the causes of peace, justice, mercy and righteousness in our community and in our world. **HOW** can we volunteer, serve and share?

You may remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as he contemplated his death just two months before his assassination. He said, "Every now and then I think about my own death, and I think about my own funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize. . . I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody . . . say that I was a drum major for justice . . . for peace . . . for righteousness. I just want to leave a committed life behind."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Albion, *Making A Life, Making A Living* (New York: Warner Books, 2000).

Jesus told his apostles, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." You are here today in these church walls because someone prayed this prayer and someone responded to this prayer. You are here today because seventy-two believers prayed and went and shared.

They shared the coming of the kingdom of God, and their message and their ministry, empowered by the Spirit and authority of Jesus Christ, spread to every continent on earth. But the work isn't done.

Jesus calls us to be his apostles, to speak as one speaking the very words of God; volunteering and serving with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. May we do it with grace and selfless love whether it be volunteering in Sunday School, helping at FISH or knitting mittens and scarves. Following worship today, may we all take our part in the greatest mission and message in the history of the world, to announce the coming of the kingdom of God until the day Jesus returns to make it so.

Amen.