

Did you know that a sermon is actually a form of a conversation?

This particular conversation started on Monday when I read the lessons. It continued throughout the week as I studied them, prayed and thought about them in the context of our lives together. Now I'm telling you about the initial fruits of that conversation. If I do this correctly, the Holy Spirit is working with or even through me. You are giving me feedback through your facial expressions and body language. And, in your mind, you are reacting to what I am saying. Something in what I say may resonate with you and so you've created space for the Holy Spirit to work with you. You may have already seen that in this morning's bulletin, I have left space for you to jot down some thoughts in reaction to today's Gospel. Please feel free to write them down or even doodle while I'm speaking.

Taken together, today's lessons from Scripture tell us that what we do matters to God. The portion from Isaiah might be summarized by "you talk a good game but actions speak louder than words. God is being given lip service and God's people fail to do as God asks." For those in Isaiah's audience who might have replied, "who me? what more must I do?" Isaiah spells out what is expected: "learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

The opening verses of our Gospel passage conclude a lengthy passage from Luke that seeks to help us understand that meaning is not found in things; a fulfilled life is found in relationship with God and with our fellows. How we use what we have been given matters to God. We are meant to share. Keeping it all to ourselves is not how God would have us live; by God's own example all of creation has been given to humanity so that we can survive and thrive.

As part of God's creation is God's own kingdom and God means for us to have it. God's kingdom is eternal, it has existed in the past, it exists right now, it will continue to exist forever. We have access to it. We participate in it. We help bring it fully into existence. Jesus says, make purses that don't wear out. We do that by making sure that our purses and wallets don't keep too much of its contents to ourselves, so that they don't sag, bulge or rip. Arguably, if we keep just enough for our own survival needs we are safe from thieves.

There are "things" we can save up, Jesus says, save up an unfailing treasure. These "things" are the actions that more fully realize in our present God's kingdom. What do we know about God's kingdom? We know that sorrow and sighing doesn't exist there. We know that the poor, the oppressed, the orphan have places of honor there. We know that we

are all welcome there. We know that Jesus has prepared a place especially for us there. We know that we all want to be there!

While there's absolutely nothing we can do to gain our entrance into the Kingdom - we don't and can't earn it, Jesus has done that for us - it is within our power to lessen our brothers and sisters experience of hell on earth. We do it by drawing back the curtain on the Kingdom with how we share ourselves and our treasure. It's all a matter of what we cherish and how we spend our time and our treasure.

There are some objective criteria of how well we do this. Simply pull out a calendar and a bank statement. How we spend our time tells us who and what we value. How we spend our money also tells us who and what we value. We really need both to evaluate whether we are doing our part to fully realize God's kingdom in our present. I can use our own community by way of example to show that using just one measure won't tell the whole story. If you look at our budget, you'll see that the largest single expense is paying staff. The next largest expense is maintaining the property. Very little is spent on outreach. Using just this measure, it doesn't look like we're doing so well Kingdom-wise.

Looking at our time, however, another picture emerges. The time our volunteers spend far outnumber the time spent by paid staff. Their time and service touch far more lives than the number of people who come here

in this space, at this time, on Sunday. Our volunteers add beauty by their care of our garden or enhancing our worship; our volunteers meet basic needs and necessities of our neighbors reducing their misery and their struggles just to survive. By this measure, we seem to be doing something right in making God's Kingdom a present reality.

It takes a certain amount of courage to be intentional about actively working toward God's Kingdom as a reality for all of us in the present. We know that God's Kingdom isn't experienced by everybody because words like "poor" and "oppressed" have meaning to us. We know that suffering and sighing is part of every life that has ever existed. How do we reconcile "what is" with "what it is supposed to be?"

The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us we do it "by faith." We do it with trust in God. We do it because God gives us hope. God made the whole universe, God made it out of nothing according to one Genesis account. This creative God has always been faithful to us. We have every reason to trust in God and what God promises. From the same Genesis account, we see the heroes and heroines of the faith heard God's promises, believed in them and acted on them. Abram and Sarai moved from a very comfortable home in Mesopotamia and spent the rest of their lives in a tent. So did their children and grandchildren. Yet they trusted and believed that God was giving them land for them and their

descendants, even though they didn't live to see it. They even believed that God could give them at least one child even though Sarai was post-menopausal. Likewise, God had Moses lead his people out of slavery to the promised land, yet Moses himself never entered it. He trusted in God's promise.

The Exodus story became essential to Americans in bondage in the 18th and 19th Century. They trusted in God's promise to the poor and the oppressed and their rightful place in God's Kingdom, even as slavery persisted in generation after generation. This faith, this trust, this hope gave enormous courage to people like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

Trust in God and faith in God's promises along with the hope that provides, were equally essential in the Civil Rights movement. How else can the courage to face police dogs, water canons, and tear gas be explained? Marching and working for civil rights came at great personal cost and sacrifice. Hanging on to God's promises made the cost and sacrifice endurable.

Trust in God and faith in God's promises and hope is what each of us must hang onto. God gives us the gift of faith and that gift causes us to respond in such a way as to reveal the Kingdom. We may not be called to stand on a picket line or risk our own personal safety or to show such great

love as to lay our life down for a friend- we are all called, however, to look after one another.

How are we called to do this? What tangible thing do we have that symbolizes this call? Maybe this thing is a kayak or sailboat moving on the river under a full moon, the sounds of August all around you and you soak up God's creation in love, appreciation and praise and you share this experience. Maybe it's your gardening tools, as you lift up in prayer all those who need God's help as you remove the weeds and plant next spring's bulbs. Maybe it's a piece of jewelry that invites a conversation or conveys your faith. Maybe it's a chip from a 12 step group, noting however many days or years of sobriety serving as a reminder to not only take one day at a time but also to live out the 12th step to share the hope of the program with another. Maybe it's your worn Bible, underlined and highlighted, with notes in the margins. Maybe it's an apartment that we lovingly furnish as we support a refugee family resettle in America.

Whatever that thing is, whatever that symbol may be - may it also be a reminder that our worship is meaningless unless we live out our faith as we go out the door. And we can live out our faith by trusting in God and putting God first. We share our hope with our neighbors and we give of our selves and our abundance.

Year C Proper 14 Isa 1:10-20

Luke 12:32-40

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

Amen.