

Trinity United Methodist Church

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“Seek God First in Service”

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Scripture: Matthew 25:31-40

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

Sermon

Good Morning. Today is Laity Sunday. It was established by the United Methodist Church in 1929 to be observed yearly on the third Sunday of October. Its purpose is to highlight and celebrate the ministry of ALL Christians, in every capacity, everywhere. When I approached Pastor Dan about doing Laity Sunday and observing it, he said, “Wait. I think I have a wedding to perform that weekend. Perfect! Go for it.” Lynn Cupp and Rick Hope are both out of town this week, which I found out when I asked them to help me with his. So I was working

closely with Robin Zeman organizing the worship services. Well, God bless her, as many of you know- Robin was called to be with her mother who is critically ill. So I want to remember Robin in prayer; I have been praying for Robin and her mother and her entire family. She was going to be doing this, what I'm doing right now, because I had asked her to and she had graciously accepted, but we switched it up in time for her to go, SO you have me.

The term LAITY was first recorded in 1535 and defined as "any religious worshippers OTHER than clergy." That would mean...*US*. We are the Lay members of the church. (Now some folks, like Reverend Joe Savinsky, kind of straddle the fence: Clergy and laity/active member of the congregation).

By virtue of God's covenant with the human race, through Baptism and Confirmation, we become ministers of Christ's righteous work. We become messengers of God's love, mercy and grace, demonstrated by a life of gratitude and devotion. These are super important words for us as Christians: GRATITUDE and DEVOTION.

As Methodists, our foundation rests on the Wesleyan belief that we are "saved by grace." Grace is defined as "the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God," in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. John Wesley, our "beginner," galvanized people to put our faith to action by "good work of piety and mercy, compassion and justice," with a focus on mission and service.

In Matthew 28:17, Jesus says, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you." That's US....

LAITY.

So let me just clarify a couple of terms related to "laity."

Lay Servant: You see advertisements for Lay Servant education. A lay servant dates back to 1746. The personification, known then as the "Exhorter," was first

recorded by the British Methodist Conference in 1746 and required clergy approval with the purpose of assisting with preaching, teaching, and baptizing, but not to administer the sacraments. When John Wesley's Methodism migrated across to our continent, due to a lack of available clergy and the space between, it became a lay-led movement. Much later, in 1956, the term Lay Speaker fully replaced the referral to Exhorter.

Eventually, in 2012, Lay Servant Ministries was the adopted nomenclature and today includes 3 categories:

A **Lay Servant** is categorized as either Basic or Certified, based on education level and serves their local church ministries. The **Lay Speaker** is certified and authorized to preach the Word in multiple venues, within or outside of their local church; The **Lay Minister** is further certified and authorized to conduct public worship, preach the Word, and assist in program leadership and more. These ministries are a response to God's call to care for and nurture others in his name. Trinity has members in each division of the Lay Ministries.

A **Lay Leader** is another entity within the Laity. It's a completely different animal, though. Lay Leader is an appointed position within the local church's leadership. The role is to connect the congregation with the Pastor; communicate the vision and needs of their local church, advocate; model responsible and faithful discipleship; inform and embrace the laity; help connect church and community and assist the Council in matters of the church, among other obligations. The Lay Leader is required to attend and participate in the scheduled meetings of the Administrative Council, Finance, Staff Parish, and Nominations committees as a voting member, representing the general congregation in each. There is no particular education, certification or preparation requirement to accepting the position, other than a desire to serve.

I am the Lay Leader at Trinity. I do have an e-mail, and you can see it on your bulletin. And I would love to hear from everyone, your prayers, your concerns, your ideas, your complaints – bring it all. Send it in an e-mail or flag me down. I usually attend the 11:00 service. It's the best way for me to do my job and

connect with you all. So, in that light, I've made a change, and we are going to have some Associate Lay Leaders, one for each service. And together we will team up as your Lay Leaders. Okay?

So, as LAITY, FIRST, we are God's. We need to recognize, honor and prioritize that attitude before we can attempt to do His work. We must position God in the CENTER of our lives; at the very core of our being. As Methodists, we are a connectional church, sharing our basic Christian beliefs with congregations and churches all across the globe. We are connected by the "Spirit of Christ as brothers and sisters in Christian love;" "One in Christ, called to proclaim God's wonder and works, bringing us out of the darkness of sin into God's marvelous light." The words of 1 Peter, Chapter 2.

We are part of something larger than Life which satisfies our sense of belonging and motivates us into action. I think once we realize God's infinite love and presence in our own lives, we become hungry for more; to learn and grow in our devotion to him and to do his work.

1 Peter 2:9-10 expands to say, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Take a look at the Thanksgiving Covenant on page 52 of our hymnal which we read when we profess our faith at our confirmation or baptism.

Baptismal Covenant of Thanksgiving

**"We give thanks for all that God has already given us.
As members of the body of Christ
And in this congregation of the United Methodist Church,
We will faithfully participate in the ministries of the church
By our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness."**

("Witness" was added in 2008 by the UM General Conference.)

So... what do we do with that? Look at the 5 behaviors we profess in faithful cooperation.

Prayer: Pray! Pray alone and in the quiet, as Jesus says in *Matthew 6:5-9*. Nurture your relationship with the “Father, who knows what you need before you even ask him.” Pray together, in corporation with other Christians. But also listen patiently with open heart and mind for what God intends for you to hear. Humility can be a powerful guide. Pray often.

Presence: As we participate in the many programs and ministries of the church, we grow through our shared experiences within these walls. Attending services, participating in Bible studies and other learning opportunities guide our faith journeys and offer a place to question, evaluate, discern and confirm. In the presence of other believers, we can comfort others and be comforted in the knowledge of our shared love for Christ and Gods’ promise.

Gifts: The Holy Spirit has breathed into each of us certain gifts-- not talents or abilities-- but spiritually driven capacities intended for our use in ministry within the framework of our faithfulness to God. Beginning with 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the Spiritual gifts as parts of the body of Christ, so that in connection with one another, since we are all different and we have different gifts, through our diversity, we make a whole.

Have you ever taken a Spiritual Gifts Assessment? It can be a fascinating discovery and enlightening. You can go on the internet and look up “Spiritual Gifts Assessment” and you’ll find multiple venues, multiple avenues that offer a spiritual gifts assessment. And you can take it online and it will give you some results that are enlightening. It connects where you are at the moment and what the Spirit has driven you to become or to do.

We are inspired by the words of the Apostle Paul to “seek the greater gifts,” those spiritual gifts, so that we may hold each other up in humility and unselfishness, thereby doing the work of Christ that He first exemplified for us.

But let's not forget the kind of gifts that we have received in this world; the physical gifts. As we have been blessed, we are admonished to share those blessings with others who are less fortunate and to return a portion of those blessings to their rightful owner, God Himself.

Service: This is HUGE! For it is in service that we honor God giving of ourselves to the benefit of others. The acronym JOY sums it up top to bottom.

J-Jesus

O-Other

Y-Yourself.

It helps us to be centered in who we are and what we should be doing. So if we put God at the center of our lives, we understand the value of serving. Jesus said, "So if I am your Lord and teacher, and have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done for you." (John 13:12-15). Jesus also said that the greatest Commandment of all is to "Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself". Caring for ALL Gods' creatures is what we are commissioned to do. As we read earlier:

".. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me"...Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25: 35-37,40)

Reminds me of a story. I reconnected with a friend of mine from college on Facebook. We were wild, we were having a good time, but she is a devout Christian at this point in time. So I look to her sometimes for some guidance. But she sent me a video of a young college co-ed who found a butterfly with a broken wing. She said it was in October and she was concerned because this butterfly had a long journey and it was going to be cold and it was crippled. So she took the butterfly "under her wing," and she nurtured it. She looked up online how to feed it, what they eat. So she fed it citrus, she cut up citrus and the butterfly ate from

the citrus. Eventually some sugar water she added to the diet. And she took it to class. She laid on the floor in her dorm room and had it walk on her face. It loved being in contact with her. She read to it, she took it to the beach on sunny days. She eventually took it on her ten-hour train ride home for Thanksgiving. Now, normally a butterfly of this type lives for two to six weeks. She kept it for 11 weeks. Truly an act of compassion.

Have you ever seen the traffic stop in Smithfield for some fool that gets out and goes and picks up a turtle and moves it across the street so it doesn't get run over? (That would be me.) Do you stop and wait for the squirrel? Do you do that? We should, because there's no reason for a squirrel to be dead on a 25-mile an hour speed zone. There isn't, really. God has given us dominion over ALL his creatures, and He wants us to be caring and compassionate with one another, with all His creations.

You know, in this church, we can love on one another, and we should. We see one another when we're downtrodden and say, "Hey, you okay?" and really mean it. We do that. We can say, "Hey, why don't we sit down and have some coffee?"

But what about the person we don't know? Who comes in, looking apprehensive? You say, "Hey, there's some refreshments back there. Let's go and have some together. I want to hear your story, and I'd like to tell you mine." Give time. Give of yourself, because life is short (eat dessert first). And give. Give, give, give.

Caring is compassion in action. If we take the time to care, we can change the world around us and make a difference in the life of Gods creations, one at a time. We can do something thoughtful or kind, not random, but deliberate and make someone's day brighter. We can offer Jesus' light to one another and change their life right then and there. That's God-like work! Caring is contagious. We become Christ-like when we do things that Christ would do. The act of inclusiveness offers respect and celebrates diversity. We are ALL god's children. When we seek justice for the afflicted or a remedy for a problem that someone else is facing, we serve.

And finally....

Witness: In all that we do, we are called to glorify God. Are we not? None of us is perfect. That we know. But we are called to model Christ in our lives. We are called to share the story of his life and death so others will know the love of our Father God.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Whether we choose a Lay Servitude role or another form of faithfully honoring God's grace, we need to remember that as John Wesley purports, it is not in the **DOING** as much as in the **BEING** that we witness for Christ Jesus and serve the Lord, our gracious and almighty God.

AMEN