

Methodist Roots: Good Works

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 4 2024

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: 1 Samuel 12:19-25; James 2:14-26; Matthew 7:21-27

Reflection: Psalm 37

Greeting: You are saved by God’s grace because of your faith. This salvation is God’s gift. It’s not something you possessed. It’s not something of your own doing that you can be proud of. We are God’s accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives. (Romans 2)

Prayer: Lord, we ask that you remind us of your grace that is always with us. Help us to do good just as you have taught us to do. Remind us of how to act because we have been given the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank you that you are with us in all things, and that you have brought us together in this place so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Heavenly Father, watch over us. Let your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us. And may we celebrate the love and mercy found in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. It is with hope and faith we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 37

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good; live in the land and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will make your vindication shine like the light and the justice of your cause like the noonday. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. (Psalm 37:1-9 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 37 and hear of trusting in the Lord. That we are called not to worry but to act with God. That we are called to do good through the Lord and that we will find comfort and safety in following him. How do you respond to God invitation in grace? Do you lift up prayers asking for guidance and understanding? Who can you pray with this week so that you may strengthen each other in faith? What are the things that you do to share the love of Christ with others? How do you celebrate God’s love and grace as part of your life? How can we live out our journey in Christ together?

Prayer: God, you are there for us before we know that we need you. Help us to remember your love as we respond to your grace through good works. May you help us this day that we may remember your steadfast love and faithfulness. We come before you now with the joys and concerns that we share on this day. We turn to you now with the celebrations that we have spoken together. We turn to you with the worries that we have lifted up with each other. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that you will lift us up in love that we may know your strength. Help us in our laughter and our tears and guide us in sorrow and rejoicing. And may we join together joyfully by faith to celebrate your presence with us in love, forever and always. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from 1 Samuel chapter 12, verse 19 through 25.

All the people said to Samuel, "Pray to the Lord your God for your servants, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins the evil of demanding a king for ourselves." And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart, and do not turn aside after useless things that cannot profit or save, for they are useless. For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king." (1 Samuel 12:19-25 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from James chapter 2, verse 14 through 26.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is worthless? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was brought to completion. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. (James 2:14-26 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 7, verse 21 through 27.

[Jesus said] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.' "Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" (Matthew 7:21-27 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week as we continue in our Methodist roots, we take a look at what it means for us to do good works. Now, I'm focusing simply on the entire concept of good works, because we will get into detail about the kinds of works that we do in our next series when we explore the means of grace. We do have a connection to last week's message, because this is all part of how we live out our experience in Christ through the grace of God. And I wanted to talk about good works because sometimes we get very mixed up with the way that we think about faith and works. This is often because we think that they are in conflict with each other. But they really are simply two very important parts of how we understand grace. When I talk about good works, I don't talk about them apart from God, I talk about the things that we do to reflect the love of God in our lives. That our good works come from seeking out God to help us in our lives.

Our readings today highlight the way that we live out a life in Christ. They reflect how we continue to live out the grace of God in our lives. That we see that our actions should reflect our faith. We hear this in 1 Samuel. The people have gotten themselves into a bit of trouble. They have demanded a king, and so the people are worried that they've upset God. But Samuel's response is that even if they have messed up, they should continue to follow God. That they should not turn away from trying to do what is good. Instead, they should focus on fixing their mistakes by doing good. Because God isn't going to turn his back on his people. We should instead strive to do all that we can to follow God. Samuel's response is that he is going to continue to pray for the people because that is something he does to honor God. He's not going to stop teaching the people because that is something that he does to honor God. Because all people should serve God with their whole heart, with their whole being. This gives us a picture of how we do good as a response to God and as a way to honor God. That we do good so that we continue to follow God in what we do.

In our gospel reading, we hear about how we should act on what Christ teaches. Jesus teaches about having a firm foundation in following God. That when we hear Christ's words and we act on them, it is like building a house on rock. That when we build our faith on a firm

foundation, it will stand strong against any storm. But when we ignore those words and we do not act on what Christ has taught, it's like building a house on the sand and it quickly falls and is washed away. That's what a flimsy faith looks like. When faith is built upon simply thinking and never doing, it quickly falls away at the first challenge. Because faith is more than simply thinking. I highlight that because sometimes we get the idea in our heads that faith is saying the right words and that that's everything. It's thinking the right thoughts, and that's everything. That's not what we are taught about faith. Because it isn't that we shouldn't think as part of faith. We should say words that reflect our faith, but faith is more than words. Faith is how we show that we believe the things we think and speak. That Jesus knows us by how we live our faith in him.

James does an excellent job of laying this idea bare for us and letting us know why good works matter as part of faith. Because though we can talk about how it is faith in God alone that saves, we then have to explore the idea of what that faith looks like. And that's where a lot of people get hung up and not quite understanding what James is telling us. Because the first thing that we hear in our reading today is that it does no good to think about faith and not act on it, because faith without works is dead. That if you want to share your faith, it is shared through good works. James gives a very poignant example for this. What good is it to tell someone to keep warm and to eat their fill, but for them to have no place to rest and no food to eat? It does no good. Telling somebody to be full does not put food in their belly. Because true faith acts on what we have been taught. True faith is acting on what Christ has taught us. That faith without works is a dead faith, because it's hollow. Because it is one thing to say, Jesus Christ is my Savior, it is another to live it. Now you may be saying, "I can't do everything. Does that mean my faith is always going to be hollow?" And to that I would say no, but you do have to do something. And when we do it right, the two can't be separated. James notes that we cannot show faith apart from works. That when he talks about faith it is in relation to works. That the two go together. James challenges the idea we often have of "faith alone." Because though we do not earn salvation by our works, our works are how we show we have accepted salvation. James does not challenge that salvation is through faith in Christ, he challenges the idea that thinking is enough. That we could tell people that they just need to say some words or say a particular prayer to be saved, but that is not how grace works. Because it might teach people to say the right words, but not how to live them. And we need to be able to stir up a faith that will nourish the soul and not just be words to comfort the mind.

Let's say you demonstrate your faith through good works, and you go to build a house for someone in need. They might ask why you are volunteering to do such a thing. The response would be that you wanted to share the love of Christ with them by giving them a place to live. In that, you have demonstrated what it means to have faith. If you give someone food, they might ask why you are feeding them. You might say that it is because Jesus taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves, so you are sharing that love because they matter. That is demonstrating faith with works. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without

works is also dead. James is just reiterating what Jesus said, because faith without a strong foundation in works is just planting your feet in the sand and hoping that you don't get blown over. Because the foundation we find in Jesus is that of our rock and our redeemer. He is the cornerstone that has become the foundation of our faith. He showed us how to live out our faith. That we do it by living with each other and helping each other. We do it by lifting each other up, because we serve each other humbly. All because we follow the example and instruction of our risen Savior.

I say all this because I want us to understand the importance of good works in relationship to God's grace. Because good works are how we respond to grace. That we accept that invitation from God. We accept salvation and we repent. Our response to that is not to sit and think. Our response is not thoughts and prayers. Our response should be prayers and action. Because our good works are how we respond to prayer. Our good works are how we respond in faith. Our good works are how we respond to the love of God in our lives. Our good works are how we move with the Holy Spirit. Our good works are how we respond to the salvation that we find in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Because our good works are everything that we do for God. Our good works are the things that we do in the community to help our brothers and our sisters. Our good works are the devotions that we read, and the prayers that we have. They are the studying of Scripture that we do alone and together. Our good works are when we come to worship together in this place. Our good works are the songs that we sing to lift each other up and praise God. Our good works are coming together to share of one bread and drink from one cup, as we remember we are the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood, serving one God, that we may do his will. But we can only do that when we go, and we do. So let us not have our faith be dead but let us be alive in Christ with all that we are and all that we do. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Methodist Roots

We begin a series that looks at our Methodist heritage. “Methodist Roots” will be a six week look at the way that we follow Christ as United Methodists. We will be discussing the way that we live our lives in Christ, how we study, and how we interact with each other.

7/14: 3 Simple Rules

7/21: Reading Scripture

7/28: Grace for All

8/4: Good Works

8/11: Think and Let Think

8/18: The Individual in the Community

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Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St

PO Box 267

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd

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Worship 9:30am

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