

“God, Scouts, and Service”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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Today’s gospel lesson is from the book of Matthew, chapter 25, verses 34 through 40. I’ll be reading from *The Message* by Eugene Philips. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.’

Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. God of love and compassion, move in us this morning to hear with ears tuned and refined by your caring spirit. Bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and especially our doing as we recognize you in the midst of our busyness. Amen.

Scouts have a lot in common with the ministry of Jesus. We as a congregation have the same goals too. Ministry to the poor—it’s a continuum in our lives that reflects our inner self, and it points to the goodness of God. Jesus said our behavior is reflected in how we interact with those in need, so our goal is to extend the grace and love of God whenever we can.

Sometimes it's more difficult than it looks to help someone. It can be problematic because we may have never had the same challenges. When I was 18 I lived in Philadelphia and began studying at a music conservatory. I had lots of opportunities to help people. The conservatory was in center city; it was packed with hundreds of homeless people.

On one occasion, I was on my way to Rittenhouse Square Park. When I arrived I sat down next to an old woman in shabby clothes. She'd just woken up from a nap. I began feeding the pigeons, and I found her staring at my bread.

I asked her if she'd like to feed the birds with me and she said yes. I gave her a piece of stale bread, and instead of feeding the birds, she gobbled the bread down faster than anyone I'd ever seen. I was a little shocked.

I asked her if she'd like something to eat and she said, "Oh that would be wonderful, please." So, I handed her a five dollar bill, and off she went to the corner store across the street. She soon returned and said, "They wouldn't even leave me in the door!" She was angry, but then she started begging me to get a carryout for her. So off I went. When I came back, I gave it to the old lady, and watched her inhale it. She was starving.

Americans—most of us here have everything we need. Our lives are busy, and we're use to taking care of ourselves. Most of us have never been in want of food and shelter. It's hard for us to understand what it would be like to not have the basic needs for living.

Sometimes I think we'd rather hand out the money—as I did—Instead of getting involved. To give money is great, but I remember the lesson about the old woman in Philly well. It forced me to get personally involved in the woman's life. I had to expend some energy. I had to get involved. I had to look her in the eye. I had to hear her story. That was a lesson I'll never forget.

In the passage read by Jake, Jesus reveals himself incognito and says, “I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.”

Jesus reveals himself pretending to be somebody else dressed in rags and begging for a handout. Who would have ever guessed we’d find Christ dressed in rags. Here’s where Scouts and Providence congregation have a common goal. We help others. We serve them, and we come face to face with Christ.

Service is our duty. We feed the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, we visit the sick, and we minister to those in prison. Sometimes we can resist taking the time to serve the poor. Maybe we think we’ll never be in that position. At the moment at the moment, we have money, and we have family who can help us in a time of need. But what if we found ourselves destitute and in need? What if the tables suddenly turned?

Maybe we’re just too busy, or we did that 7 years ago, and now we just have too many things going on in our lives. Or, we don’t have a dollar to spare, or we’re late to a Scout or church meeting. Or maybe, thinking a bit more honestly, we might think, what’s in it for me? If you’ve asked that question, then it may be you haven’t tried serving others when no one’s looking. Maybe one of the reasons God wants us to serve others is that we never know when we might need the same kind of help. At the end of the day, we come to realize, when we serve others, we’re doing the best kind of service we could ever do for ourselves.

Now I know there are those of you out there in the congregation today who lean more toward the side of sensory evidence. So here’s some food for thought. In a 2006 study, Jorge Moll and colleagues at the National Institutes of Health found

that self-sacrificing behavior releases endorphins in the brain, and it produces positive feelings known as the “helper’s high.” So physically speaking, we actually become the beneficiaries when we serve others.

And who wouldn’t agree that the world needs to promote behavior that lead to cooperation and foster an increase in community service. There’s nothing like giving to someone in need that causes one to feel alive and to know the blessings of being socially connected in community.

That’s what Jesus was doing when he was a man. He was reaching out and making connections with people in need, and most of the time, they were people who were ostracized in the community. They were people who were rejected from the mainstream of society. Jesus knew that being ready to serve others and to care about doing our duty to God is contagious. He knows all about those endorphins that begin to fly around in us when we care about some else—after all-God created those endorphins.

Jesus knows the benefits of doing community service. It’s the best thing we can do for ourselves. If all you have is money to give because your back won’t straighten great! Give that money! If you have no money and all you have is a strong back, great! Work that back! If you have no money and a bad back, then give what you do have—send a card, make a phone call, and pray. But whatever you decide to do, do your duty to God because it’s the best thing you can do for yourself. Always be willing and ready to help someone in need.

Let’s pray. God of compassion and service, make us instruments to do our duty and do what we can to supply the needs of others. Open our eyes to see beyond our own needs and to reach out to those who stand on the outskirts of society and are marginalized. Help us to serve as you serve, never diminishing the worth of someone in need, but choosing to extend mercy and love. Make us the hands and feet of Christ. Amen.