



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Twenty First Sunday After Pentecost**

**October 18, 2015**

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## **“Into the World”**

(John. 17:15,18)

Rev. David K. Groth

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world . . .  
As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the  
world” John 17:15,18

**COLLECT:** Lord Jesus Christ, in Your deep compassion  
You rescue us from whatever may hurt us. Teach us to love  
You above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves;  
for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.

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In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Priest and the Levite did not stop to help that man. They passed by on the other side of the road. So do I. So do you, just about every day of our lives.

A couple of weeks ago there was a tragic car accident on Concord Avenue. Two teenagers were killed, three more critically injured. Later that week I was driving back into town on the same street and noticed the tree with the balloons and cards and flowers and candles at the base. The scars to the bark of the tree do not match the scars and devastation and pain this accident has caused.

As I passed by there were six teenagers sitting in a circle near the tree . . . probably trying to make sense of it all, trying to be supportive of one another, trying to cope and work their way through the darkness. I thought to myself, you should stop. You should pull over and get out of the car and introduce yourself and ask if it would be ok if you sat with them. Ask them to tell you about their friends who were in the car, what you'll miss about them. Use the skills you've learned as a pastor and mostly just listen, perhaps offer to pray with them before you go, but at least let them know you care for them and about them.

Then, that other voice started talking. You know about that voice. It says things like, "Nah. They're so young, and you're not. They probably would think you're some kind of creep. If they wanted your help they would come to you. They'll probably say 'no, and that would be awkward. And besides, all those counselors are available for them at the high school, and anyway, you have some things you need to get done. So, I kept driving. Literally, I passed

by on the other side. I chose not to serve. I missed the opportunity to share Christ in our city.

One of the goals of our Ignited emphasis is to become more externally focused as individuals and as a church. We need to become even more relevant to our community through our service. We need to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the community.

Pastors worry a lot these days about the changing morals of the culture seeping into the church. Maybe I, maybe all of us, should worry more about getting our hands and feet and voices to seep out into our community in his Name.

Consider how he went out into the world. He walked the dusty roads and the city streets serving the needs of the people around him. He loved them and ate and drank with them and laughed and talked late into the night with them. He welcomed the unwanted, the unclean, and the marginalized into his company. He gladly received the children into his strong arms. He fed the hungry and comforted the grieving, raised the dead. And as he himself died, victim of the worst that can be done to a person, he continued to serve, making arrangements for his mother, forgiving his tormentors, pouring it all out for the world, his blood, his life, his love. That whole picture, that's what it looks like to be in the world. That's the goal to which we aspire and the standard by which we measure ourselves. He made it clear time and again that his followers would be known not just by their doctrine or their orthodoxy, but by their actions. "They will know you are my disciples by your love" (Jn. 13:35). He also said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Therefore he also prays, "Father, I do not ask that you take them out of the world. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them."

So my question is, how do we measure up as the church, as the Body of Christ, to the standard he has set? How do you, as an individual, measure up?

We tend to think of church as a place we go to,

something we “join” or “attend”. Christ thinks of the church as the people of God, on the move, his body in the world.

We think of a successful church as one where the parking lot is always full of cars, people coming and going for this program or that. Maybe we need to rethink how we measure our success. Maybe we need a new scorecard. Maybe we should be asking, “How many of us are being the people of God out there?” How many of us are serving out there, sacrificing out there, giving away in the name of Jesus Christ our love our time and our service out there?

Sometimes the church forgets the command is to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Instead, we unlock our doors and sit back and hope people will come. When that doesn’t work, we try to lure them in. Figure out what the market wants and then try to provide the product. And as Americans well versed in consumerism, we happily buy into that. We shop for churches like we shop for cars. I want four wheel drive SUV with good gas mileage, Bluetooth, heated seats, and a sunroof. I want only Praise music, or I want only the traditional hymns. I want a church with lots of people my own age. I want it close to home, with good coffee. I want the preacher to have a good sense of humor. And what I don’t want is this, this and this.

But really, it’s not about you and what you want! It’s about Jesus, how he has loved you and saved you and called you to be his disciples, his hands and feet and voice out there in the world. Don’t think of this place like a restaurant or a Best Buy where you come in to consume something and then go back home. Don’t think of church as a part of your life, along with work, leisure, hobbies and family time. Following Jesus into the world is not a part of life but a *way* of life.

Jesus said to his people, “You are the light of the world.” No one hides their lamp under a bushel. That would be ridiculous. And if it’s only in here that you let your light shine you’ve become irrelevant to everyone out there. It’s out there where your light is needed most, where you live and move and have your being.

An example. Kenny Soriano-Garcia works at a

McDonald's in downtown Chicago. He works at the cash register and isn't paid very much, nor does the position carry a lot of status. Recently, an elderly man in a wheelchair came up to his counter and said, "Help me, please." It came clear he needed help cutting and eating his meal. Now it would not have been unreasonable for Kenny to say, "I'm sorry. We're busy, and I cannot leave my register." Or, if Kenny had an attitude, he might have said, "This isn't a Nursing Home, and I'm not a CNA." But that's not what he did. Instead, he shut down his register, washed his hands, put gloves on, and helped the man eat his meal.

Now, I don't know what you do to earn a living. Whatever it is, I'm sure the Lord presents opportunities to step out of that role and do special work in his Name. Look for those opportunities. I missed an important one the other day on Concord Avenue. I wish I could have another crack at it, but it came and went. However, more opportunities to serve are coming our way. In our Epistle, Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand*, that we should walk in them." That is, he's teeing them up for us. All we have to do is take a swing. And remember Jesus said, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

So if it's not to consume something here, why do we come, especially given that it's yet another sermon on stewardship and generosity, in this case the generosity of our time and talents. Let me offer a model that's completely different from the consumer model. This is a place where you come to be fed and strengthened by God's Word and Sacrament, and then sent out again to serve in his Name. The church is where God equips you for service.

Luther taught that faith is nothing but a sack that receives the gifts God wants to give us. So, for example, we come up to the Lord's Supper and receive into our sacks God's forgiveness and grace in his body and blood. Then, in turn, we take our sack of gifts out into the world and give them away, his forgiveness for those who have sinned against us, his grace for the children when they are at their

most challenging, his love for the loveless. As the week goes on our sacks grow empty and so we come back to have them filled again, to hear the Good News of God's mercy for us sinners and slackers. Out we go again, giving those gifts away in our vocations. You can see it in our mission statement, "Every day, everywhere (not just in here!) by everyone . . . sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd." Can't you see how that's different from the consumer model?

How important is all this? Important enough for Jesus to be thinking and praying about it the night before his crucifixion! "Father, as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." Therefore I'd like to see every one of us find some way to serve in our community. I'd like to see every able person in our congregation doing something to improve this community. Find a way to use your time and skills in meaningful service out there: volunteering at the hospital, delivering meals on wheels, coaching a team, helping out at Camp Matz, taking care of an elderly neighbor, painting a room at the Health Center, teaching English as a second language, picking up litter from the river banks.

Must everything we do have an evangelistic purpose attached to it? I don't think so. We don't do acts of mercy just so we can evangelize people. We don't do good works just to get the PR or grow the church. We do them because that's who Jesus is and that who he wants us to be. We do them because people deserve to be blessed simply because they are people whom God created, people he accounted worthy even of his death. We serve others mostly because that's what they need.

Finally, remember Jesus has already done the heavy lifting. He has already suffered for our sins and died our death. In the parable, we see ourselves passing by on the other side. We've all done it. But we also see ourselves as the Good Samaritan, because we've done that too. Mostly, however, see yourself as the one lying half dead in the middle of the road because that's ultimately what sin does to

us. It kills us. And see Jesus as the Good Samaritan who did not pass by the other side. He went out of his way and came to where we were and attended to our needs. He has bound up our wounds and picked us up with his strong arms. He did not miss the opportunity. He did not talk himself out of it. In the parable and on the cross, he did whatever needed to be done, however messy or inconvenient or expensive or painful. He brought us back from the brink and saved us from sin and death.

In baptism he's already given that salvation to you. It already belongs to you. It's in your sack! No one, not even the devil, can take it out. There are other goodies in there too: God's Word, mercy, faith, the fruit of the Spirit. Yours is not the mission to pull that sack out of the closet once a week and drag it in here just in time for worship. And yours is not the mission to save yourself with your good works, for you have already been saved by grace alone. But yours *is* the mission to carry that grace with you out into the world, wherever you go, and give generously to the world some of what God has given you. Serving in his name is not a part of life. It is a way of life.

“Father. . . I do not ask that you take them out of the world . . . As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Amen.

