

## *Worship and work must be one.*

*Isaiah 1:10-20; Hebrews 11:1-3; Luke 12:32-40*

When are we going to finally learn that we actually need each other? This is a question that I wonder about a lot. When will we learn that when it comes to faith, there isn't just one way of living it out?

The Gospel of Luke paints a pretty clear message for us today. Having faith, being faithful followers of Christ, is not passive. We can't just simply sit and assume that we will have faith and that the world will change. We are being reminded again today, like we were last week, that where your treasures, there your heart will also be, so therefore, be dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be ready, be dressed for action. This message that we are being given today through Luke that says "Be ready, so that you will receive blessings."

So let's go back to the beginning from Luke, where it says: "Do not be afraid, little flock." When you hear that passage from Isaiah, you might be afraid. But I'm here to tell you to not be afraid. Often, when we hear this message of being dressed for action and having our lamps lit, we can sometimes become disheartened and fearful. Fearful that we have somehow failed God. Fearful because we might actually treasure some of the material things in our lives. The thought of selling all of our possessions makes us uneasy and it often brings with it a sense of guilt because we know that we are not capable, nor willing to get rid of everything we own, and to simply live on the promise of what others might offer us. And it's okay. Do not be afraid.

But what if this passage is simply challenging us with the following test: Do we want to live our lives of taking, or do we want to live lives of giving? If that was the question you were asked, would you be as afraid? Do you want to live lives of taking, or do you want to live lives of giving?

Faith, as it is written in Hebrews 11, is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Faith is therefore a way of knowing that constantly seeks understanding. Faith enables us to cope with the trials and tribulations that we face in our lives. Faith includes the awareness that the meaning of life is not found in the accumulation of wealth, power, or privilege. The meaning of life is found in loving God and loving our neighbour. Faith is therefore where worship and work become one.

Throughout my ministry, I've seen the age-old struggle and tug-of-war between people in a community of faith about whether or not the emphasis should be on worship alone, or it should be on our mission and ministry. I want to start by saying that both are

essential to faith. What God is saying through the prophet Isaiah today is that the source of God's problem with worship is the disconnect between what happens inside the sanctuary and what happens outside of it. We're human; we are going to make mistakes. But we need to remember that what we learn in worship should then be lived out in the world in the same way. So it's not good enough to come to worship and say we are faithful followers, and then go out and attack our neighbour. If we are taught to love one another, how are we going to do that in our daily lives?

We are being called to practice what we preach – and that includes me. So know that you are not alone in this. Through Isaiah, God is inviting us into a time of reflection, discernment...to determine whether our intentions are honourable. God says, "Let's argue it out. Let's have a conversation." We're being invited to refocus our attention. To wash ourselves clean, to remove the evil of our doings, and then we are told that we are being invited to learn to do good. To *learn* to do good; it doesn't mean that we have to be perfect. We need to seek justice; we need to rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan and plead for the widow.

God's admission that burnt offerings and solemn assemblies of iniquity are a burden seem harsh and unlike the God of love and compassion we have come to know. This passage might leave us feeling judged, which again, can lead to shame, guilt, and self-condemnation. But remember that God doesn't stop there. God doesn't just end the passage by saying, "What you guys are doing, I don't want any part in it." God says, "Let's talk, *and* this is what I want you to be about." God invites us into a dialogue, God wants to get our attention and God wants us to be ready to receive the blessings that God is freely offering every single one of us. But we often miss those blessings. We often don't notice them if our possessions are the things that we are focused on more than God.

The act of worship, the art of worshipping together, the practice of worshipping, helps us to put God at the center of our lives. It's a reset. Every single week that we come and worship together is a reset to make sure that whatever we do starts with God and God's call to us. Worship isn't about being seen like we are faithful followers. Our actions need to be authentic. Our worship needs to be an outpouring of gratitude and awe that opens us to receiving God's blessing. To receiving God's comfort, as well as receiving God's challenge so that we live our faith in the world.

Throughout my journey of faith, hymns are often what have helped me to understand these teachings in a deeper way, and today the hymn that we are going to sing afterwards, called "Worship the Lord" is a song that I have learned when I was quite young in church, and has stayed with me ever since. Each verse ends with the words, "Worship and work must be one." Which is why I entitled the sermon what it is today.

In the first verse of this hymn, it expresses the importance of worshipping God when it says: "Raising our hands as a sign of rejoicing. And with our lips our togetherness voicing. Giving ourselves as a life of creativeness. Worship and work must be one." That verse itself speaks to the importance of worship. Coming together as a collective group.

To be reminded that we are not alone, and it's not our sole responsibility. We gather in worship to speak our prayers of deepest longing, to share our concerns, and to confess when we have done wrong. When we worship, we take time to present ourselves to God, not our animal sacrifices, as was the practice back in the day as Isaiah was prophesizing.

The second verse of the hymn then speaks of the importance of acting on our faith. It says: "Praying and training that we be a blessing. And by our handiwork, daily confessing. We are committed to serving humanity. Worship and work must be one." As this faith community, we are committed to serving humanity, and this is done in many ways. I don't know if you've noticed, but each Sunday that we gather, we begin by naming what it is that we value as a community of faith. That being inclusion and diversity. The statement of welcome and inclusion found in the front of the bulletin clearly states that all people in this community of faith are welcomed and included regardless of differing abilities, ethnicity, economic circumstances, sexual orientation, age and gender identity...and I still want to add one more thing: theological and religious diversity. *And* we then go on to say that it's not just about this one piece, but we also live out this value by standing with people who are adversely affected by injustice, alienation, and oppression. With this diversity comes challenges and occasionally some rubs. We might think that we are all here for the same reason. We may believe that we all live out our faith in this world in the same way. But it's simply not true. The way that we live out our faith is just as diverse as the gathered body of Christ here in this space.

About a year and a bit ago, we explored a concept called *The Theological Banquet*.<sup>1</sup> The idea that this table of God gathers people from all over the place. From different experiences and different backgrounds. Each person needs to be at the table. Each person brings unique gifts and skills that bring beauty and diversity and help us to truly live out the breadth, the fullness of God's mission and ministry in this world. There are many ways of describing God, and if I were to ask you what word you would use to describe God, I guarantee we would hear over twenty different versions. One's understanding of who and what God is will inform, then, one's understanding of how God is active in the world. And one's understanding of how we see God active in the world will inform how we answer the call of God to be part of God's vision of hope, peace and love in the world.

The theological banquet named five different general expressions of faith, and we tend to have a dominance in one or the other, but we still might do a little bit of each. The first one is Evangelism. God in Christ has come to save and transform our lives. People who express their faith evangelically share Jesus with others. Not to be confused with how this word has been used in a bad way. It's not that we're telling you how to live, but we are sharing our experience of Jesus in the world, and the difference that Jesus has made in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Gear, *Theological Banquet*, 2021.

Some people are more Ecclesial. People who do the work of the church specifically. These are the people that serve communion, greet us at the door, help count the money, put together the potlucks and teach our children and adults about spirituality. There are so many different ways that we are of the church in the world. In this particular category, the Ecclesial, God is the Holy Spirit revealing the internal and the embodied presence of Christ. People who are Ecclesial worship and learn about God.

The next category is Missional. Missional expressions of faith are where God is healing and blessing lives and communities. God does this through the presence and actions of neighbours and disciples. So people who are missional go where the need is. Think about our Community Dinner. Think about our Magic Pantry, where we give out bag lunches. Think about the people who help somebody on the street when they've fallen. Think about the people who go out to our care homes because somebody is alone. Think about the work of the Bissell Centre here in Edmonton. That is what the Missional expression of faith is.

It's closely followed by the Ecumenical expression of faith. This is where God is mending the world, saving and transforming lives all over the place. It's the call to radical justice. Social change. Ecumenical people live out their faith by challenging injustices in our institutions. Protesting when someone does not have a voice. Changing our laws; changing the ways that we as a culture hurt and harm one another.

Finally, we have our Spiritual expression, where God permeates all Creation and beckons the soul into life. People who are Spiritual open their lives in holiness and wisdom. Spiritual people help us to remember that God is present, not just in this sanctuary. They help us find a way to connect to God in a deeper way. Through spiritual practices.

And again, what is most important about all of this is that we need each other. So you don't have to do all of this. But we do need to acknowledge and affirm and value what every other person is bringing and offering. That is what is going to help us to bring worship and work together here at Robertson-Wesley. When we acknowledge and value every single person's gift in this space and time. I hope that these scriptures remind us that in order to be people of faith, we need both-and; not one or the other. We need to come to worship to be filled, to remember that God is at the center of our lives, to be inspired and nourished so that we can go out and live out our faith in the world. In a way that reflects what God wants. Not what we personally want, but what God wants us to be about in this world. Take time this week to think about how has this worship service inspired you to live your faith in the world. How will you acknowledge God at the center of your life every single day until we come back again next Sunday? So let us continue to argue it out with God. Let's have a dialogue with God in our prayers and in our actions.