

March 3: Holy Communion

Message #8: Disciples Make ... A Difference

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

Text: Acts 9:36 “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.”

Memory Verse: “Don’t forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.” -Hebrews 13:16

Blurb: This is the last of our Disciples Make message series, and we end strong...and visible! Being a disciple of Jesus is an inner journey of surrendering your selfishness. Yet it is also an outward journey into the world. Disciples make a difference in concrete, visible ways in their. This Sunday we’ll be commissioned to serve others in visible ways in our everyday lives.

Opening Song: *Threshold of Glory* - Sanctify

Welcome: -Pastor David

Memory Verse: “Don’t forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.” -Hebrews 13:16

Worship Music Set:

Celebrate

Great Are You Lord

Bob R. takes kids into lobby

Here I Am, Lord

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Serve Moment: Soap Drive for Community Helping Hand -Andrew

Kid’s Moment: Bob R.

Message: Disciples Make . . . A Difference

Bumper Video

PP#1: Disciples Make . . . A Difference

Acts 9:36 “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas). Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need.”

We come to the last of our winter message series on discipleship. We’ve been learning that disciples of Jesus make disciples. They make Jesus #1. They make the Holy Spirit their guide in life. They make patterns of spiritual growth in their daily lives. They make God talk in their normal, ongoing conversations. They make friends so we have more opportunities to make disciples. And today, we learn that disciples make a difference in our world.

Jesus, you see, came not just to teach stuff. He came to *do something*. He came to make a difference. He came to change the world.

He did that when He came to preach and teach and point to God. But as God, He also came to change the world by earning people's forgiveness by dying on the cross. He came to open the gates of hell by defeating Satan. He came to win eternal life by rising from the dead. Jesus was on a mission, to the cross.

That mission He accomplished all by Himself. But along the way, He called disciples to follow Him, to join Him, to join His movement. He was preparing for the next part of His work, the changing of the world, which He commissions His followers to keep doing until His return.

And so, when people decide to follow Jesus, we follow as He continues to make a difference. Disciples make ... a difference! Acts 9:36 tells us about one such example. There is a woman named Tabitha, who was an early disciple. Look what it says about her. "In Joppa there was *a disciple* named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); *her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need.*"

Tabitha is not the exception. She is noted because she is an example of what disciples are supposed to look like. She is first identified as a disciple, and then that claim is backed up by observable reports.

Imagine if the Bible were to introduce you. What, do you think, it might say to describe you? What are you most known for? What do you spend your time doing? "In Forest Lake there was *a disciple* named David. His surname was Werner. He was always busy ... playing his video game, Plants vs. Zombies. Every day he played it, and he did not miss."

PP#2: *Image of Plants vs. Zombies game.*

That's true, you know! I've played it almost every day for nearly eight years. I've even made my family, when we are on road trips and didn't have wifi—because the game is on my tablet and I don't have data on it—I've made my family pull into the McDonalds parking lot just long enough for me to download the daily game off their wifi. It's kinda sad!

But, never again! You see now...I have an app on my phone that turns it into a hotspot!

But I really desire to be known for something different than that. I don't want to be known by my hobbies. I don't even want to be known for being a pastor. I want to be known as a disciple of Jesus, and as a disciple, I want that confirmed by everyone who knows me, as having observed me to spend my time doing consistent good works, compassionate acts, and helping those in need.

Now in this series, I've distinguished that there are non-believers who do things to help people. There are people who are not following Jesus who, without acknowledging it, are actually helping Jesus' work. I've also distinguished that simply doing good does not make you a disciple. Further, disciples don't *just* do good works. They must combine works with words, motivation with motion, purpose with performance.

Non-disciples don't have to do good.

Doing good doesn't make you a disciple.

And you can even believe in Jesus as your Savior and not do good works.

But disciples *must* do good works. Those who choose to follow Jesus are also choosing to join His work. It's all the same decision.

PP#3: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid." -John 14:27

Jesus' work is not just spiritual salvation, although Jesus did come and die on the cross to do that. Jesus' work is not just emotional healing, although Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He gives a peace nothing like the world gives. And Jesus' work is not just physical, temporal help, although Jesus healed the lame and blind and said that when we help out the least of the population, we are helping Him. Jesus' work is spiritual, emotional, and physical, because as people, as humans, we are spiritual, emotional, and physical beings. Jesus came so that we might have life, and have it abundantly and eternally.

The Bible uses a special word to talk about this wholeness that God desires for all people. It's the word *Shalom*. *Shalom* is often translated "peace." But that's only part of it. *Shalom* is more being in a whole state: being right with God, others, and ourselves. It's being centered, at peace, complete. When Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives," this is what He meant.

So, Jesus' grand work, the fullness He is doing, is bringing in God's kingdom on earth. That means restoring to *shalom* all people, and to all things. So, as disciples, we must take a holistic approach—a *shalom* approach—to the work we do for Jesus. That means we believe in Jesus as our Savior. That means we follow Him as our Lord. That means we surrender ourselves inwardly and outwardly to Him. And that means that our observable lives witness to our discipleship, both in the words we share—words of life—and the deeds we do—good works. We join Jesus in the holistic healing of our world: mind, body, and soul. Disciples make a difference.

PP#4: Ephesians 2:1-10 (CEB)

1 At one time you were like a dead person because of the things you did wrong and your offenses against God. 2 You used to live like people of this world. You followed the rule of a destructive spiritual power. This is the spirit of disobedience to God's will that is now at work in persons whose lives are characterized by disobedience. 3 At one time you were like those persons. All of you used to do whatever felt good and whatever you thought you wanted so that you were children headed for punishment just like everyone else.

Ephesians 2 is famous for talking about how we are saved through faith, and not by works. It's a core passage of Scripture for salvation. But let's take a closer look. You might be surprised by what it says about works. Ephesians 2, starting with verse 1. "At one time you were like a dead person because of the things you did wrong and your offenses against God. [You were dead in your sin.] You used to live like people of this world. You followed the rule of a destructive spiritual power. This is the spirit of disobedience to God's will that is now at work in persons whose lives are characterized by disobedience. [Not following God, but following selfishness. Verse 3,] At one time you were like those persons. All of you used to do whatever felt good and whatever you thought you wanted so that you were children headed for punishment just like everyone else."

Careful now...did you hear that? Doing whatever feels good and going after what you *want*, that's the *ungodly* way! That describes people without God!

PP#5: Ephesians 2:1-10 (CEB)

4-5 However, God is rich in mercy. He brought us to life with Christ while we were dead as a result of those things that we did wrong. He did this because of the great love that He has for us. You are saved by God's grace! 6 And God raised us up and seated us in the heavens with Christ Jesus. 7 God did this to show future generations the greatness of His grace by the goodness that God has shown us in Christ Jesus.

Verse 4, “However, God is rich in mercy. He brought us to life with Christ while we were dead as a result of those things that we did wrong. [We were dead...we didn’t get it ourselves!] He did this because of the great love that He has for us. You are saved by God’s grace! And God raised us up and seated us in the heavens with Christ Jesus. *God did this* to show future generations the greatness of His grace by the goodness that God has shown us in Christ Jesus.”

PP#6: Ephesians 2:1-10 (CEB)

8 You are saved by God’s grace because of your faith. This salvation is God’s gift. It’s not something you possessed. 9 It’s not something you did that you can be proud of. 10 Instead, 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.

Verse 8, here’s that grand verse! “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 you did that you can be proud of.” And most times we stop reading there. I memorized only verses eight and nine. But there’s one more verse in this paragraph. The thought isn’t completed yet! Look at verse 10. “Instead, 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.*”

We have the inner faith in Jesus, *and then* we have the outer works of goodness. This is the fullness of salvation, *shalom*, discipleship.

PP#7: Disciples Make ... A Difference!

1. “Do not grow weary in doing good” -Galatians 6:9

All right. I want to share three biblical insights about good works, and then I want to end with an invitation for you to step up your good works.

Disciples are supposed to be make a difference in the world by doing good works. Like Tabitha, we are to be known for always doing good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need.

The Bible says do not grow weary in doing good. Now, first read that means to not stop. Don’t take a break. Keep going.

Methodists have this “method” in how we live as disciples. We have three general rules. The first is to do no harm. The second is to do good. Right there it is! And the third is to keep doing those things that keep us close to God. These are the three general rules we live by.

PP#8: *Picture of John Wesley with the “Do all the good you can....” quote.*

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is believed to have told Methodists this charge. Read it with me: “**Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.**”

Here at Forest Hills, we have always been a good *Methodist* church in this way!

PP#9: Disciples Make ... A Difference!

1. “Do not grow weary in doing good” -Galatians 6:9

But when we celebrated our 50th anniversary last year, we realized that perhaps we were growing weary by keeping *too* busy doing good. We're a busy church, and we far out-perform a church our size in what we do. The concern was, however, that the good we were doing was making us weary. We were doing good in a way that was draining us. So that verse took on new meaning. Do not do good in such a way as that it causes you to grow weary. Disciples need to learn to pace ourselves, to work from our strengths, to take on only what we can do well.

Now, doing good works *should* make you tired. But it's a good tired. It's a tired on the outside with a rejuvenating spirit on the inside. The Holy Spirit is your power and energy, making you able to do what you cannot in your own strength. But be warned. You can become extended beyond what is healthy, and it can drain you down. You need to have wisdom to limit what you do.

As a church we took a jubilee Sabbath rest. Now, we are firing back up again. But we don't want to just go back to doing all that we were before. We want to use the Spirit's leading to carefully choose what we are busy doing. We want to do the *best* things we can do, not just a bunch of good things. So, we're working towards doing what is best. That's why, for now, we're not adding Kid's Church on Sunday mornings. We're keeping our kids discipling to Wednesday evenings. We're not going to take up the Bluegrass Festival again this summer, or VBS. We're trying to discern what are the best things we can do to make a difference. That means we don't do everything we *can* do. We are listening to the Holy Spirit for what we *should* do.

PP#10: Disciples Make ... A Difference!

1. "Do not grow weary in doing good" -Galatians 6:9
2. We don't do good works as an end in themselves
 - "Let your light shine before people, SO THAT they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven." -Matt. 5:16

The second biblical insight about good works that disciples do, is that we don't do them just to do them. They are not ends in and of themselves. The purpose of our good works is so that others can come to know God. I said this earlier: even nonbelievers do good. But disciples do good in such a way that others can see what we do and give God the glory. Our good deeds should not bring us glory. But nor should they bring *noone* glory! They are to bring God glory. So, consider the good you do. Do you do it in such a way so others praise your Heavenly Father? This is God talk again.

PP#11: Disciples Make ... A Difference!

1. "Do not grow weary in doing good" -Galatians 6:9
2. We don't do good works as an end in themselves
3. Good deeds make a difference in YOU
 - "You know these things, but you will be blessed if you do them." -John 13:17

Third point. We normally focus on the good that we do, the help we lend, and the blessing we are able to extend to others. We know that our good works help others. But did you know that this is not the only reason why we do them? The Bible says that when we do good deeds, not only are the benefactors blessed, we who do the deeds are also blessed. That means that in God's work, there are not givers here and receivers there. No. In God's work, everyone who gives is also a receiver! Doing good may take effort and sacrifice, but it also makes you feel good! God designed it that way.

And this is another one of our methods as Methodists. We do good works to help *us* get closer to God. Normally Christians think, 1. they get close to God, and then 2. they feel compelled

to go do good. But Methodists have the reverse method, too. When we don't feel close to God, we get busy and start doing good. As we do, we will discover more of God in this blessing. We help until we are helped. We give until it feels good. We work until we are rested. We are blessed when we are a blessing. So, if you ever feel far from God, go find some of God's people, and get busy doing good.

PP#12: *Motivational image for going out and doing good works*

And that's where I want to get to today. I want to urge you to get busy, and stay busy. This is not some big sales pitch, not some flashy promotion. It's the simple truth that disciples make a difference. Every week we have a listing in the bulletin of things you can join in doing to make a difference. This week, remember to buy various kinds of soaps and bring it to the lobby here at church. Our newsletter and web site lists things each month that you can join in to help make a difference. The third Saturday of the month is our food distribution and car repair programs. Show up and do some good! Each season we do a bigger project with and in the community. The week after Easter we're going to pack rice meals over at Hosanna Lutheran for a Feed My Starving Children community marathon. You can also do all kinds of things on your own, all day by day, to make a difference. Volunteer at Community Helping Hand or the Youth Service Bureau. Help shovel a neighbor's driveway. Take some meals over to those people who struggle to get out in the snow.

In your bulletin insert, write down one thing you're going to do *this week* to make a difference...one thing before next Sunday. Then, below that, write down one thing you're going to do *this month* to make a difference...your March deed.

But remember to work in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Do the *best* things you can do, those things the Holy Spirit lays upon your heart. "Do not grow weary in doing good."

"In Forest Lake there are disciples named ... you! Their lives overflows with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need."

Amen.

Holy Communion

Prayer of Confession

Words of Assurance

Words of Institution

The Great Thanksgiving

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Distribution of the Elements

Offering

Song: *I Come with Joy* -Sanctify

Closing Song: *Different*

Memory Verse:

"Don't forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices." -Hebrews 13:16

Announcements: -Pastor David

Benediction: -Pastor David