

Do the Good That Is Yours To Do

Third Sunday in Advent

Luke 3:7-16 Isaiah 58:9b-12
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
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Our Advent resource from A Sanctified Art invites us to enter a sacred new chapter in our lives this season. Think about the implications: entering a sacred new chapter in your life, and me in my life, and us together in the life of College Hill. They suggest words and phrases to help us do just that. We've looked at "**You are a blessing**" and "**We can't go alone.**" Today, I'm particularly thankful that we are going to explore what it means to "**Do the good that is yours to do**". Or, as Mother Theresa put it, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."

Our Old and New Testament passages also provide guidance. The Gospel of Luke introduces us to **John the Baptist** as an important character in and through his role as a precursor announcing the coming of the Messiah, the work and ministry of Jesus. John is not the Messiah, but he paves the way for the One who is. John the Baptist does the good that is his to do. That includes a harsh denunciation of those who perpetuate economic disparities and abuse their power. Therefore, John's message is also one for our day and time. Yet, he also provides them a path of redemption – for even they have good that is theirs to do. This is true, then, for all people.

As John teaches about bearing fruit worthy of repentance (turning back toward the ways of God), the crowds, tax collectors, and Roman soldiers all ask him the same question. "**What, then, shall we do?**" John's answer to each group is slightly different, but ultimately the same: "**Do the good that is yours to do.**" Each response involves **bearing good fruit through acts of justice.**

To the crowd, John tells them that whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever had food must do likewise. To the tax collectors, also seeking to be baptized, he tells them to collect no more money than the amount prescribed. And to the Roman soldiers John tells them to not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusations, and to be satisfied with their wages. In doing so, each can all be what the prophet Isaiah calls, "repairers of the breach" by satisfying the needs of the afflicted.

This passage invites us to bring forth restoration through ordinary actions: feeding the hungry, service the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted. Collectively, we can all work together to help repair the breach in our culture and society. We're certainly trying to do that here in Tulsa. And **when we ask of ourselves, "What, then, shall I do?" the specifics will differ for each of us, but the answer is basically the same, "Do the good that is yours to do." That's a helpful reminder when we think there is nothing we can do when looking at the enormity of the world's problems.** That applies to issues in our own personal lives, as well. Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that instead of the stress of trying to look for results way down the road, simply decide what it is you can do, or not do, in the next 24 hours, or the next hour, or even the next minute, as the case may be.

We are being reminded that **small, achievable, ordinary actions that we can do add up. We can't solve all the world's problems, but we can do something that matters**

here and now. And we must trust that we each have something to offer and that other parts of the community will bring what we cannot. That speaks to the different and varied gifts and talents that each of you bring to the life and ministry here in this community of faith. **None of us can do it all, but we can ask of ourselves, "What is mine to do?"**

Resource biblical commentator Kayla Craig offers the following. "In the overwhelm of daily responsibilities and the barrage of global crises, it's easy to feel like anything we do or say is simply a drop in the ocean. Yet, in this liturgical season of expectant hope, we must remember that the good we do in the world has ripple effects beyond what we can see. We are not the world's saviors, but we move toward the One who invites us into the work and who labors alongside us. Advent reminds us that Christ came into a world fraught with the very same issues of injustice and inequality that we face, and he did not turn away. Instead, **Jesus showed us a way forward: engaged action rooted in compassion.** We may think, "I'm just one person. What can I do?" Yet, as followers of Christ, we're invited to consider a different question, one rooted in hope and action: "What is mine to do?""

Kayla Craig also offers this wisdom. "This Advent, in the quiet spaces of our hearts, where God's still, small voice speaks, we are called to discern what is ours to do. **Frederick Buechner** articulates this discernment: "**The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.**" So, let me ask: *What makes you come alive? What are you passionate about? How does that meet a need?*" You may be inspired to action by asking "What is bugging you?" What frustrates or persistently tugs at you? Are we not spurred to engagement in our efforts to make something right? What small thing might you be able to do about it?

Craig, along with myself, offer some suggestions. "Maybe you can extend hospitality to a lonely neighbor, [have coffee with a friend, smile at a stranger, visit or text a friend in the hospital or recovering at home, bring some food for the Kendall Whittier Emergency Food Pantry or something for the Day Center for the Homeless, tell a loved one you care for and about them,] volunteer at your local school, or do the personal work of healing that prevents the passing on of generational wounds."

Here are some things we are doing here at the church. Our Outreach & Mission ministry team, thanks to your contributions to our church budget, is about to disperse over \$9,000 to several local, national, and international agencies in our efforts to reach out to those in need. Our Alternative Christmas Gift Market has already collected over \$500 to support a variety of ministry efforts. And, we will take a special offering at our Christmas Eve Candlelight service of worship to benefit Emergency Infant Services.

Returning to her theme of a quilt, Kayla Craig adds, "Each good work, no matter how small, is a thread in the fabric of God's ongoing creation story—one where love overcomes, peace prevails, and new life emerges. This Advent, remember that your efforts, though they might seem modest, are part of a larger, divine tapestry. With God's help, may our acts of love and works of justice lead to the flourishing of all people."

Now, as in our previous Sundays of Advent, I'll close with a blessing.

You are uniquely situated to bring light into the world. May you find courage this season to do the good that is yours to do. It matters. May you see the ripples of your actions expand outward, touching lives and mending the fabric of our shared humanity.

Amen.

Resource: A Sanctified Art, Advent 2024.