

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Psalm 71:15-24

Luke 24:44-49

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

What are those 5 practices God gives to each of us in our baptism in order to help us stay connected to that wonderful relationship God invites us into and also to more fully carry out the identity as God's people responding to the richness of God's grace in doing God's work in the world? Once again they are (and next week we will have a quiz): to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

We tackle the fourth tonight, which again is: to serve all people following the example of Jesus. The document, *Faith Practices in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – Living Our Baptismal Covenantⁱ* states the following:

Serving is at the heart of Jesus' ministry. Making the connection between Jesus feeding the five thousand and setting up a food pantry is easy. God serves others through us. Jesus calls us to be more than good wait staff. The ministry of feeding is commendable, but there is more to serving.

To follow the example of Jesus and serve all people requires us to get involved in the lives of others. Jesus valued relationships. Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, making time for children or comforting his friends Martha and Mary serves as a blueprint for moving us beyond projects and anonymous charitable activities to relationships.

Following the life of Jesus leads us into the mess of life where lives are transformed and Christ is made known. Serving as Jesus serves brings us closer to Jesus, the one who did not come to be served but to serve.

As we serve following the example of Jesus Christ, we can:

- Visit the sick and the imprisoned

- Feed the hungry
- Respond to disasters
- Walk alongside others
- Give of our resources

One of our key themes in spending time on these five faith practices is the fact that through them the Holy Spirit is at work drawing us closer to God and into a fuller relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Some of these are easier to grasp than others aren't they? For instance, it's fairly easy to make the connection God draws near to us through living among God's people, hearing the word of God and sharing in the Lord's Supper or proclaiming the word of God. But what about serving all people following the example of Jesus? How does serving others strengthen our connection to our Lord?

I spent just a few minutes this afternoon reviewing some of the feedback that appeared on my computer screen after typing in the phrase, "How to strengthen our relationship with God?" on the internet. Now, I didn't look at each of the nearly 3 million responses my browser said there were; however, after spending time quickly scanning several dozen it became apparent a lot of them were merely done on a personal level. That is one could strengthen one's relationship with God by spending more time reading the Bible, in prayer, and inviting God into one's heart. Very few I looked at had anything to do with our relationship with others, such as through service. Why is that? Especially, when we get passages such as this one from Mark 10:45, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" Or, our gospel passage earlier in which Jesus commands us to love as He has first loved us. Perhaps, it stems from our culture that places an emphasis on individualism and we get turned inward focusing squarely on our needs, wants, and desires. This carries over into the realm of faith and it becomes about me and God and not God and us. Because it's always

about God and God's people and God's creation. It's always about God rescuing us from those things that draw us away from God. It's always about God desperately seeking us out, grasping for our hand, returning us to the fold and forgiving us time and time and time again because that is who God is and how much God desires to be in relationship with all God has created. That is what this season of Lent and Easter is all about; and for that matter what the birth of God's Son on Christmas is all about. God drawing near. God saving God's people. Yes, Jesus came for each of us but Jesus also came, died, and was raised to new life for the world. Jesus came to serve and not be served. Serving others draws us closer to God because service is at the very heart of who God is as revealed in Jesus Christ. Also, in serving others we find ourselves face to face with Jesus Christ as he reminds us in Matthew 25 when he states, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

¹ For a copy of this document go to: <http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant>