

King of Glory Lutheran Church
September 10/11, 2022
God's Work Our Hands – Matthew 23:1-12
Rev. Debra Abbott

Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 23:1-12

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

As we gather together for worship this weekend I find myself thinking about the past, the present and the future for several reasons.

One reason for this is that this past Thursday Queen Elizabeth II died. Maybe some of you have listened to or read reflections on the Queen's life. Her long life takes us through the history of the last century. We have been reliving all of the highs and lows of the Queen's life but also of her country and the world. In his speech to the world on Friday, King Charles III spoke of his mother's devotion and service to her country and promised to follow in her footsteps of service.

Another reason to reflect on the past, present and future is that this weekend also marks the anniversary of September 11. For those of us who remember that day this anniversary takes us to the past to that terrible and tragic day. But it also takes us back to a time when people came together to help and support one another. People lined up at blood banks, found new ways to serve and practiced love instead of hate. We see throughout history that in the times of greatest suffering there are always people who respond with love, compassion and service.

And another reason to reflect on the past, present and future is that for many years now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has sponsored God's Work Our Hands Day every September. The church of course has always been about service to the neighbor. But each year ELCA congregations throughout the United States go out into their communities to show God's love through service to the neighbor.

For many weeks now our Loveland Lutheran congregations have been preparing for God's Work Our Hands Day. On September 11th 90 people from our Loveland Lutheran congregations will:

- pack food bags and serve dinner for Loveland Community Kitchen
- clean the food bank at House of Neighborly Service
- decorate Christmas food bags that HNS will distribute
- do yard work around Lincoln Elementary School
- create chalk art at senior living centers
- wash windows and help around the homes of seniors connected by a program called "A Little Help"
- cook and serve dinner to college students at LuMin – Lutheran Campus Ministry at CSU
- learn more about our sponsored refugee from Afghanistan

If you aren't able to participate in any of these service projects we have one today that you can take home. Join us in the Fellowship Hall after worship for some delicious tacos and then stay for a few minutes and write a thank you note to emergency first responders in our community. Or take a few cards home and send them to someone you know who makes a difference in our community.

Whether you are 3 or 103 today there is a way for you to serve your neighbor. I've just given you 10 ways we will see it happen this weekend. But I know that there are many ways each one of you does God's work with your own hands every day. Thank you for your service.

Our scripture readings today also call us to service.

From the prophet Micah we hear, *"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

We know that Jesus knew the words of the prophets because he repeated them and shared them in his preaching and teaching.

Today in the gospel of Matthew we find Jesus teaching again. He lifts up the law given to Moses and tells the crowd gathered that they should do what the scribes and the Pharisees teach.

But Jesus cautions the crowd and his disciples not to do what the scribes and Pharisees do. They know and teach God's law to love God and love one another. But they are more concerned with their own status and authority than living out the justice, kindness and humility that are at the heart of God's law.

Jesus says that the scribes and Pharisees lay the law like a heavy burden on the people and do nothing to help ease that burden.

Jesus knows the law and the commandments and follows them. But Jesus teaches that the law is not a burden or requirement that exists apart from compassion and service for others.

Jesus healed and fed the hungry on the sabbath when a strict interpretation of the law would not allow such work. He touched those who were unclean and returned them to their families and communities when the law called for purity and cleanliness.

Jesus did not abandon the law or the commandments or the prophets. But he always looked to the creator of the law and the heart of God. Jesus put God's love into action and called each one of us to follow him in service.

He says to his disciples and to us today, *"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."*

You and I are called to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly just as Jesus knew and taught and lived out himself.

Wherever you find yourself today; reflecting on the past, giving thanks for the service of others or wondering what the future holds; Jesus calls us to follow him in a life of service and humility. So today, hear his invitation to service and know that by your hands and your service God's work will be done.

Today we give thanks to God and seek God's blessing as we go out to serve on this God's Work Our Hands weekend and so let us pray.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory; all creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth in thanksgiving for the many blessings you have given us.

Renew in us the commitment to use our gifts in the service of others, and especially of those in need. Let us be your hands to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, comfort the weary and outcast, welcome the stranger, care for creation, and be loving neighbors to all people.

Bless those who go out from here to labor. Prosper the work of their hands. Bless those who receive them the fruits of their labor, and may those who are sent be blessed in return.

May the gifts they use and share be signs of your love to all people.

To you, O God, be glory and honor through your Son, Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in your church and in the world, now and forever.

Amen.