

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
July 14, 2019
The Reverend Rick Veit

What do these stories have in common?

- A group of parishioners move all of our office equipment out of our office space so the abatement company can remove the asbestos from our ceiling.
- A choir full of orphan children are able to stay the night in our church and eat and shower because two parishioners agree to take care of them at St. Mark's.
- A group of orphans become a choir and sing God's praises (Here is their thank you letter. It will be in the parish hall for those that want to read it.)
- Kelly Wilcox, Barrett Georges, and Julia Wells are inspired to dance in our community.
- Harrison Rankin, high school student, vestry and acolyte member, is inspired to run for a United States Senate Page position for this Fall, and is chosen to be one of fifteen boys throughout the country to serve. Serve our nation well Harrison. We need good people with character and strength and compassion in Washington DC.

Are you bored yet with these stories? Oh good. Then I will continue.

- People decide to study medicine, and we now have treatments for Cancer and Diabetes and Alzheimers, and people decide to study medicine, and now we have what is known as palliative care, respite for those who are dying.
- Two vestries decide to work together and have dinner after almost 70 years of separation.
- Vice-President Mike Pence visits our southern border and sees first-hand the pain and devastation and disease amongst immigrants who want what we have: freedom.

What do these stories have in common? God acted and inspired many people to act, sometimes in devastating circumstances. People responded proactively to those Godly inspirations. And God stayed close to all of them, even when temptation and testing crept into their lives.

In last week's gospel reading, we learned that Jesus appointed 72 disciples. He then sent them out to serve others, to eat together (fellowship), to care for others (cure), and to share the message of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Notice the pattern. God takes action first, in this case through his Son Jesus. He acts and appoints the disciples. Next, God calls his disciples to be proactive. They are to take action in three ways: Eat with others, care for others, and communicate with others, being sure to share the good news that we are not alone – the kingdom of God is near.

In the book of Deuteronomy today we learn the same pattern. "The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings – the fruit of your body, your life, your home, all people....the fruit of your livestock and soil, your business and activities of life." The LORD takes action. In fact, he doesn't only take action, he delights in taking action. He delights in prospering us, just as he delighted in prospering our ancestors, just as he has prospered people from the beginning of creation, especially when things were difficult. Our God acts in our lives and God acts on our behalf and on behalf of bettering the world.

Next, we learn part two. We are to take action. From the Original Testament, we learned that we are to obey the LORD our God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law. We are to act. We are to turn to the LORD our God with all our heart and strength and mind and with all our soul. If we do not, God's work and impact and love will not spread. And what if that person in need is you?

Three girls are inspired to dance, and we have art here in Cheyenne. Our vice-president is inspired to visit the border first-hand, and we pray for action and compassion amongst those immigrants who are suffering and desire freedom. Two church vestries are inspired, and I will tell you the rest of the story or at least the next step in the story next week. We meet tomorrow night at Poor Richards. Physicians and medical researchers research and act, and people are relieved from their ailments.

God acts. We act. God is very close. The word is near.

The Psalmist today reminds us to put our trust in God because it is God who first showed us his ways and his paths for us. We put our trust in God because God first gave us salvation through the Messiah. God first showed us compassion, love, and faithfulness, and God guides us to do what is right. We then have to put our trust in God, following his ways of compassion and love and faithfulness. If we do not, then orphan children have no hope or a place to stay in Cheyenne. If we do not, then immigrants will continue to suffer and die, and two vestries and churches will remain divided, and God's mission that is St. Mark's will not survive to its 152nd birthday (Thanks office movers), and people will continue to suffer from diseases with no cures or treatments.

Where and how are you being called to take action? Will you, or will you just sit on the sidelines and watch while people suffer, watch while children need adults and role models to help them along the way, watch while an aging population that has been granted many more years of life struggle just as we did when we only lived until 40, 50, or 60 years old.

In the new testament, Paul's letter to the people of Colossae, we learn that God offers grace and peace through Paul. God offers hope laid up in heaven, and heaven is now, not just something in the future. God spoke to the people of Colossae through Paul, through Epaphras, and God rescues people from the power of darkness and enables them to share in the inheritance. He transfers them and us into the kingdom of his beloved Son where we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. God gave knowledge and spiritual wisdom and understanding of that wisdom so that we may live lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, so that we may do good works. And the people act! They do good works. They thank God. They pray. They put their faith in Jesus Christ and have love for all people. They practice their lives according to the LORD.

One last note and caution. We learn from today's gospel to beware of the enemy, Satan, temptation. Somehow along the way, as people began trying to be faithful to God, as people began to open their hearts to him, it seems as if Satan entered in at the same time. A lawyer, a "faithful" Jew, turns on Jesus, tempting him, dishonoring him, trying to trap him.

A side note: But it always seems that lawyers get a bad rap. Let me proclaim though that lawyers continue to do the work of the Lord in their profession and people throughout the world are served well and blessed. God has and continues to use them.

That said, in this story we have a bad apple lawyer and scribe, one who was filled with the LORD, but also filled with the devil...really, like all of us. We are filled with blessings and temptations. The man tries to trap Jesus. In the end, however, the gospel, the good news wins.

The lawyer approaches Jesus and asks him, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" By the grace of God, the corrupt lawyer gets the answer right: Love God with all your hearts, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, "Right. But reading is not enough. You must do this. You must act. And if you do, you will live. You will have life and have it abundantly." Who is your neighbor? It is everyone, even the people you hate the most. The Samaritans and Jews had killed each other in the past and abused one another. There is no good reason to act. But there is God's way. All people are recognized as God's people. All people are deserving of God's love. If we do not act, then God's love and joy will not be shared with our family and friends and enemies and strangers in our midst. And they will continue living in hopelessness. And, once again, what if that stranger is you?

God acts. We are to take action. And beware of the devil in our midst. Break through with faithfulness and action.