

## **“Offering Our Hands, Feet and Hearts”**

(1 Kings 5)

All around us there are dependable sights and sounds and smells signaling a shift that is taking place. Like clockwork we can practically know the time and date when we start to observe some of the following occurrences. One, our state collectively turning our attention from the slumping Brewers northward to our great green and gold fall hope found in Green Bay. Two, our mailboxes and email in-boxes filled with flyers boasting incredible, unbelievable end of summer clearance on everything in the store. Three, somber expressions plastered on children’s faces accompanied by an inverse gleeful twinkle in parent’s eyes. Four, this inexplicable desire to not wear white lest we commit some fashion faux pas. And five, the smell of charcoal and sizzling hamburgers but an unavoidable nagging sense that this might not be possible to enjoy that much longer. Next Monday, Labor Day will come and go bringing with it shifts in the world all around us. The idea to celebrate and honor our workers was actually imported from our neighbors to the North. In 1882, a New Yorker by the name of Peter McGuire witnessed a rally parade for the Nine Hour Movement and workers rights in Toronto and brought the idea back to his home state. On September 5 of the same year we held our country’s first Labor Day celebration. Since the 1880s the first Monday of September has been set aside for parades and rest for families and honoring the work of all our hands and increasingly the sounds of politicians speechifying.

For many, Labor Day this year will dawn with more reasons for uncertainty than causes for celebration. Work is a sensitive subject in our community and in countless places across our country and really around the world. There is this collective anxiety that hangs in the air like an ominous cloud. We wonder whether we as a people living today will be able to weather the economic shift from industrial to post-industrial society in the same way our grand-parents and great grand-parents saw a shift from agricultural and rural to urban and factories more than a century ago. To talk about work is tangled up with the emotional stories roaming in our hearts of friends and family and neighbors who have lost their jobs or spend Monday through Friday commuting several hundred miles away in order to keep a job. In the face of suffering, as people of faith, we can feel unsure at best and perhaps inadequate at worse on how to respond. We shake our heads, grab an extra grocery bag on the way on the church door, send an extra check to ECHO, offer a heartfelt prayer to God, or perhaps even feel a revitalized energy around that idea of hosting a free meal for our neighbors.

With that reality swirling around in our minds, we hear how in the days after Solomon assumed the rule of Israel he began his own global economic stimulus package of building a temple. He makes an alliance with King Hiram who ruled Tyre which is just north of Israel’s border. Those who lived in Tyre, called Sidonians, were like the Paul Bunyans of their day. In exchange for wheat and olive oil, King Hiram puts his people to work cutting wood that will be used to construct the first temple in Israel. In addition, we are told that as many as thirty thousand laborers from all over Israel come to start raising the roof and fitting the stones into what will become a sacred space to worship. Did you catch the detail of how the workers came and went in the

reading? We are told that Solomon rotates the workers ten thousand for one month and then two months off to return home to family, for rest and renewal and working the fields. Now, if someone were to propose such a clearly biblical model of work for your pastor, I would certainly be open to such a conversation.

Honestly, the work of constructing the temple is labor intensive. There were undoubtedly sore backs from carrying resources from one place to another, carving stone, and lifting materials from one set of hands to the next as the temple took shape. But, like hopefully much of the work we do together to share God's presence and grace today, it was a labor of love. But finding value in the work we do can be difficult. And perhaps, as a church we need to confess that we can get caught up in doing things out of obligation rather than joy. We can be lured into investing our energy in maintaining the status quo rather than prayerful discernment. Perhaps we need to acknowledge that the speed, the very pace of life sometimes makes it difficult for the thoughtful, tedious, time consuming work of trying to answer how we can most faithfully employ the work of our hands, heads and hearts in service to others.

Almost every ministry book I pick up today either explicitly names or implicitly dances around the elephant in the room of our busyness today. The blur of life we feel, the fast pace language that perpetuates and is spoken Monday through Saturday, and we sense that as we flip our calendars to September only to see each day crowded with back to school and church activities and meetings and the fall routine. But before we get caught up in this whirlwind of life, I invite you to hear the words of the Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila who lived in the 1500s and wrote countless prayers and poems. A well known prayer of hers is found on the insert in the bulletin. Would you find that and I invite us to say these words not in a monotone church-speak, but with life. In fact, when you come to the words, "yours" and any body part I invite you to place emphasis there so that our Presbyterian friends down the street hear us.

As those words roam around the room, awaken our thoughts and start to settle into our hearts, I invite you to look down at your feet. Where did you travel this week? Where did the soles of your feet touch since you last walked on our golden carpeted sanctuary? Did you walk around Janesville or even roam around another city? Did you walk into school or get a chance to recline in your Lazy-boy chair or lay in a hammock? My feet might tell you about the squeaking sound of walking on a shiny hospital floor or being tucked under a table at a restaurant as I enjoyed an anniversary dinner with my wife. Where did your feet take you this week?

Now, look at your hands. What did you touch or create this week, what stories would your hands share of the work you offered to others? I can still see stubborn specks of dirt caught under my fingernails from pulling weeds. I think about my still healing finger and how proficient I've become at typing with the other nine fingers. I think about hands I've shook greeting someone, hands I held as I prayed, and notes of new ideas I took this past week. What did your hands touch or create this week?

Now look at your heart. When did you sense your heart get tangled up in the sacred this week? Did the story of a friend's struggle evoke a tear or did a contagious joy of life cause a smile to cross your lips? Did you find yourself sitting in silence with someone and uttering sighs too deep for words? Or did your heart feel fuller as you sorted food items at ECHO or collated *Tower Notes* or helped a neighbor mow her lawn? When did you sense your heart immersed in the on-going, unfolding work of Christ this week?

If we are Christ's hands, heads and hearts in this world right now, both as individuals and as a church, how might that truth guide what we do and where we devote our energy? If we are Christ's hands, heads, and hearts in this world right now, both as individuals and as a church, where might we challenge ourselves to be faithful in letting that truth be felt with each other, in our community and with creation? If we are Christ's hands, heads, and hearts in this world right now, if that is the work of our soul, where do we feel God beckoning us to go, to do and to be this day, this week, and in the months to come?

Christ has no body but yours Teresa wrote centuries ago. And I want to invite you this morning to offer the places where you find the work of your hands, hearts and heads deepening your faith. You'll find a post-it note on the back of the insert we just read. On that post-it, I ask you to jot down a place where you volunteer or an organization whose mission speaks to your heart or a time here in the church, in our life together, when you sense those words we just read to each other leaping of the page and being lived out. Perhaps if you volunteer at ECHO or HealthNet or some other community outreach that is the place you'll write down. For others, perhaps it is your involvement with community groups where you give of ideas and energy to research a cure for cancer or Alzheimer's or at the hospital. For some, hopefully, you do sense our ministry here as living out Teresa's vision. Write down a place where your heart, head and hands feel like they become and share Christ's love. Then, bring the slip forward and stick it to the bulletin board so we can celebrate the work of our hands, our heads and hearts as we move toward Labor Day. Let us create a living mosaic this morning of our labors of love and let us see how we are sharing God's presence through the work of our hands, hearts and heads.

As you write down the places where you are living out Teresa's words, I invite you to turn to hymn #539, *Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?* and let us sing to each other and bless our post-it notes as we bring them forward.