

November 13, 2016
James 2:14-18
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“Right Now”

Good morning! As some of you know, we had a national election in this country this past Tuesday. We have a new president-elect, and starting in 2017, some things are going to be different. Whether this fills you with anticipation or fills you with dread, it doesn't really matter: it's a done deal. It is the reality in which we have to live going forward.

Election Day was, as it always is, on a Tuesday; toward the beginning of the week. My husband, Tim, came home on Wednesday and asked me, “Do you know what you do on the day after the election? You pack your lunch and go to work.” Tim is smart enough to know that he said something profound, and humble enough to be flattered that I think it's important enough to share in a sermon. Here's why I think it's important, and why I think it's relevant to us today, right now. Life is not static: it doesn't stay the same, it's changing all the time. And changes that seem great to some of you may not seem that great to me -- and vice versa. These are realities we have to live with. What defines our character as individuals and as a community of faith is how we deal with the realities that are before us. Do we put our heads in the sand or wring our hands, or do we pack our lunch and go to work?

Last week I asked you the question “What is ours to do right now?” It might not seem like there's anything heroic about packing your lunch and going to work, but I'm here to tell you there is. I know that some of you know this. You have had to deal with caring for a loved one who is dying, or an issue with your own health or the loss of a job or the loss of a significant relationship, and in the midst of that kind of stress, sometimes it's all we can do to just to hang on to minimal

amount of caring for ourselves and keeping some kind of normal routine. The accumulation of small acts of courage and selflessness may not win you a lot of praise or recognition, and you may not get paid much-- if anything--for doing it, but that is the everyday heroism of packing your lunch and going to work. It doesn't matter what work you do -- whether you're employed or retired, a student or a caregiver, a child or a grandparent -- we all have work to do. Whatever it is that gives us identity and purpose, whatever it is that if it were to go away, we'd have to re-think who we are.

Almost everyone has other people who rely on them: children, spouses, parents, patients, customers, clients. We don't live or work in a vacuum. Other people are our work, and our work affects other people. This is especially true, and has always been true of Christianity. No one is a Christian all by themselves. Discipleship never happens in such a way that no one knows. This is especially true, and has always been true of our particular branch of the Christian family tree, the Church of the Brethren. This text from the second chapter of James is a denominational favorite. If you grew up in a Brethren home, or especially, God bless you, in the home of a Brethren pastor, I can about guarantee that you have heard these words before :

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace,; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (2:14-17)

It is no coincidence that our denominational tagline is "Continuing the work of Jesus" -- not continuing the *faith* of Jesus. I hope at Creekside we are doing both. And I believe that the one of the ways we do that is by packing our lunch and going to work.

I have heard from some of the small groups, and from at least one individual what you think is ours to do right now. Most of these are not great big hairy audacious extravagant expensive ideas. They are what I would characterize as bloom where you're planted ideas: let's look around at the neighborhood where we are and try to figure out

what the greatest needs are. Then let's look at one need and see if there's a little piece of it that we at Creekside could do something about: a few children who could be helped and valued, some young adults who might be searching for a community, older adults who may be alone or lonely. I'm not saying we have to do all of these things, or any of them, but we need to do more than pray that everyone will keep warm and eat their fill; we actually have to pack our lunch and go to work.

There will always be a place for faith. Without faith in Jesus Christ, our good work is the United Way or Oprah with a lot fewer financial resources. But if our faith in Jesus Christ does not motivate us to follow the example of Jesus Christ and live as disciples of Jesus Christ and pack our lunch and go to work, there is something missing from our faith. It is our faith in Jesus Christ which gives us the courage to reach out to our neighborhood even though we're afraid we might fail. It is our faith in Jesus Christ that gives us the courage to try again if we've already failed. It is our faith in Jesus Christ that teaches us that we're not working out of our own strength. If we have faith in Christ, the only way we fail is if we just decide to stop following Jesus Christ and just stay home. It's more comfortable there -- safer, easier--why pack a lunch and go to work at all? I believe that God can make a lot more of our courageous failures than God can make of our cowardice. In Chapter 2 verse 22, James says that Abraham's faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. Faith and works have to go together because they strengthen each other.

For the rest of this year, the Church Board will be talking about how we at Creekside can pack our lunch and go to work. I hope you will be in prayer about that conversation. You're welcome to come to the Board meeting on Tuesday night and be part of that conversation. I'm not sure where that conversation will go, but I hope it's somewhere where we are guided by the Spirit of Christ. Here are some things that block that Spirit: "Oh this again. We always talk about doing something, but no one ever does." Or "I don't have anything to offer. I'm too _____" You fill in the blank: tired, busy, shy, scared. If the Spirit of Christ is with us, that is where we need to start. And I believe the Spirit of God is always with us.

Next Sunday is the last Sunday of the church year: it is the Sunday when the church proclaims that Christ is King: of our lives, of our nation, of our world, or time itself. It is also a time when across the United States, we are preparing for Thanksgiving and the church gives thanks for what has been and what is and what is to be. Along with our faith in Christ the King, gratitude is a fine place to start when we think of how to pack our lunch and go to work. If you think you don't have anything to offer, you don't have a very high opinion of God's gifts. If you think you're not worth anything, then you haven't heard the good news that God loves you and values you. If you think you're better than the folks who are naked -- I'm pretty sure James was speaking metaphorically there -- let's say *ill-clothed* and lacking daily food, then you haven't heard the astounding news that God loves those folks just as much as God loves you. Some of them are hungry for the opportunity to pack a lunch and go to work, to have the same identity and purpose that we have been given as part of God's family.

Pastor Elizabeth and I will be offering anointing as part today's service, following the sermon. As many of you know, the Church of the Brethren practices anointing for forgiveness of sin, strengthening of faith, and healing of mind body and spirit. But anointing has another purpose: it is a sign of God's Spirit upon us, and consecration for service to Christ. If you feel called to be anointed for any of these reasons, including being consecrated to pack your lunch and go to work in service to Christ, I invite you to come forward at the beginning of our closing hymn. As you consider that invitation, I'd like to share a poem that one of my children sent me. It's written by Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble. It's titled "When Tomorrow Comes," and it was written on November 8, 2016.

**When tomorrow comes
The sun will rise.
God will still be God;
God will still be good.
And we will still need God.
When tomorrow comes**

**Victory will be declared,
And the poor will still be with us;
Fear and food deserts,
The hungry and homeless.
When tomorrow comes
The questions will still remain:
Where have all the prophets gone?
Who speaks for the children?
Who welcomes the stranger?
When tomorrow comes
Will you honor the golden rule?
Will you pray and pay attention?
Will you make the gospel come alive?
When tomorrow comes
Be real.
Be present.
Be still.
Be hope and for Christ's sake
Be the church.**