

September 2, 2018
Philippians 2:1-5
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Creekside COB

Sermon & Litany Labor Day 2018

For hands which serve at Creekside Church:

Lord, bless the hands.

Hands which help people out of cars and hold doors and pass out bulletins;
hands which greet with a firm shake or a hug
hands which set up tables and chairs and hands that prepare food;
hands that gather plates and scrape dishes and load dishwashers;

Lord, bless the hands.

Hands which guide children and turn the pages of books and change
diapers;
hands that illustrate stories and do crafts and direct games;
little hands which color and paint and leave sticky handprints
on our furniture and on our hearts;

Lord, bless the hands.

Hands which cut fabric and knot comforters;
hands which purchase supplies and assemble school kits;
hands which are busy and hands which lie at rest after years of work;

Lord bless the hands.

Hands which use keyboards and calculators,
hands which count money and sign checks;
hands which take notes and type minutes;
Hands which design and draw and make imagination tangible;

Lord bless the hands.

Hands that push vacuum cleaners and hold toilet brushes;
hands that organize and straighten and polish;
hands that work outside to plant and mow and weed;
hands that pick and wash and cut and bag tomatoes;

Lord bless the hands.

Hands which are folded in prayer and hands which are lifted in praise;
hands which play and pluck and strum to make music for your glory;
hands which rest upon others with prayers for blessing and peace;

Lord bless the hands.

For the hands which centuries ago brought healing to those whom they touched;
And hands which performed the miracles and blessed and broke bread;
For the hands which were nailed to a cross; hands which will bear those marks for eternity;
For our charge to be the hands of Christ and to continue Christ's work together;

Lord bless the hands. Amen.

“W-O-R-K”

Good morning! I’ve prepared a meditation, rather than a sermon, for today. If folks ask me the difference between a sermon and mediation, the answer is “About five minutes.” I know you’re eager to get to the food which the Fellowship Team has prepared for us, but before we do, I want to reflect a bit on this text from Philippians 2.

Sometimes on Labor Day we have highlighted the work which you -- our members -- have done as your profession: the work which you were paid for. Today I want to think about the work we do as volunteers, specifically as volunteers here at Creekside Church. I realize that there can be quite a bit of overlap between the two; we are blessed that many of you use skills which were part of your profession -- accounting, teaching, landscaping, food service experience -- to support and enrich the life of this congregation. God bless you. But there is a difference between working for an employer and working for the church. You are amateurs, in the literal sense of that word: that is, someone who works for *amour*, the French word for love -- because you certainly aren’t getting paid. An amateur is someone who works out of love; and love puts different demands on us than employers or clients do.

I think this is the message of Philippians, Chapter 2, and I’d like to like to break that out a bit with an acronym: that is, a series of letters which spell a word. I’m going to use four letters: W-O-R-K. The Apostle Paul didn’t arrange his text for my convenience, but I think we find it all there, without having to work too hard. Stay with me, OK?

W is Worship. Philippians 2:6-11 is an ancient Christian hymn: these stanzas have formed modern hymns and choruses, too. Listen to verses 9-11 and see if you can name at least two songs which come from this text: “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the

glory of the Father.” Songs? {*Jesus, Name Above All Names He is Lord*} Great stuff, right? Worship isn’t just a really good practice for Christians, when we accept Jesus Christ and the sacrifice he made for us, we can’t help but worship him. Our identity as Christians begins with worship. It may take some work to facilitate worship -- Diane and Betty and the Media Center folks would agree, I’m sure -- but the impulse to worship comes out of a recognition of who Christ is: He is Lord, He is risen from the dead and He is Lord.

O is for Others. I think the clearest statement of how we are to treat others comes in Philippians 2:3-4. I should note that I find these verses challenging. Think about what a church or any organization would look like if we took these words to heart: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” Our work is *not* looking out for Number 1. Our work goes beyond acknowledging that all men and women are created equal. Our work is to proclaim to the lost and the least that God loves them, and just maybe our work includes having the humility to acknowledge that sometimes we are the lost and the least. Regarding others as better than ourselves is a profound spiritual practice -- and some of the hardest work we will ever do. Philippians 2:6-7 lays it out: “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross.”

R is for Relationships. This is implied in how we see ourselves in relation to others, but it is also about how we work together corporately as the body of Christ. Although we have different skills and different gifts, we are called to be working toward the same goals, because we are all following the same leader. Jesus Christ is to direct everything which we do. Philippians 2:5 says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ.” We are to treat others the way Christ treated them. We are to relate to others with the same love and grace which Christ has shown to us.

And finally, K is for Kindness. That word does not actually appear in the translation of Philippians 2. But after W-O-R I really needed a K. I believe Kindness is implied, but if anything, the words which Paul uses carry more conviction and more power than mere kindness. Here's what he writes in verse 1-2: "If then, there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, [and kindness] make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love." It is not only the work which we do, but the manner in which we do it that makes it the work of Christ. You probably remember these verses from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am ----- ? Nothing. If we are amateurs, serving the church out of love, and we don't have love, then our work isn't worth much. If our work and the way that we do it does not reveal the compassion and kindness and love of Jesus Christ, we are not speaking with tongues of angels, we're just making noise.

Worship, Others, Relationship, Kindness. Thank you for being here to Worship Christ on this Labor Day weekend. Thank you for your service to this church and your work and prayers on behalf of Others. I hope that the Relationships we have begun and built and strengthened in this church will help us to seek and discern the mind of Christ together. And finally, may Kindness be a part of all we do: kindness to one another and love for Jesus Christ, because without love, we are nothing. We give glory to God when our work and our worship are one. Amen.