Priesthood of All Believers - The Hands and Feet of Jesus

John 13:12-17 Kimby Young

1 Corinthians 12:4-13 September 15, 2024

James 2:14-17

This month I have been preaching about important beliefs in our reformed faith tradition and how they are lived out in the church. Today’s concept is the Priesthood of All Believers. It is too big a concept to cover thoroughly. So theologians among you – Paul Rath – will know this is incomplete. The Priesthood of All Believers became important in the reformed tradition as a counter act to priests who were trying to control the people and a reminder that everyone has access to God, everyone is called by God, everyone has a priestly job to do to share Christ in the world. I will pull out one portion of the idea that connects for me today with how we live our faith in the church. The priesthood of all believers means all of us are called to serve in ministry. Each of us has a job to do for Jesus. Together we serve God in the world and bring Christ’s message of good news to the world. All of us are called to show and to share God’s love. During the Reformation, this idea took shape in opposition to the idea that the priest or pope had a deeper connection to God and therefore could rule over others. In the reformed tradition, we all are priests or ministers. Because of Jesus Christ, we all have equal access to God, and therefore equal responsibility to serve God and share our faith. We all are priests, ministers, pastors, leaders. We all are servants of God following Jesus Christ, called to care for others in concrete ways in the world.

In the story from John for today, Jesus reminds the disciples, that leadership in the church is not about superiority and priority. Leadership in the church is about service and care. One is not greater than another. We all belong to God. We each are called to serve. Jesus takes on the lowly job, the messy job, the necessary job, and calls us to do the same. Jesus rolls up his sleeves and gives honor to others. Jesus touches and transforms. Jesus washes and renews. Jesus offers new life and new beginnings for everyone.

Now, in this church, you understand servant leadership. Probably you understand it better than any church I have ever served. Talk about rolling up your sleeves and jumping in – you do it. You get your hands dirty with the messy jobs, the hard jobs, the practical jobs, the thankless jobs. I suppose that’s because you are mid-westerners. You are country and farm folk – even if you aren’t on a farm now. You know what it means to work. You know the importance of pitching in. You are hands on people and you do hands on mission. You even include that in your mission statement that you believe you are called to be the “hands and feet of Jesus” here in Gardner – offering help and hope to all. And you have lived that out every day of your ministry here on this corner for over 160 years. You are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

While I do want to applaud you and affirm you and encourage you, I also want to challenge you. Jesus demonstrated servanthood for the disciples, not just to make a point, but in order to call out the best in the disciples. The ministry of Jesus Christ is not about being honored for what you have done in the past, it is about looking forward to what can be done next for God. So what is next in our mission here at First Presbyterian Church of Gardner, and how can you help? How can you be a part of God’s work here and now – the hands and feet of Jesus – helping and caring and sharing God’s love?

All month you have been hearing about the new ideas coming out of session, deacons, pillars and committees. Many of you are involved in those projects and programs. If you are not and you would like to be – we can hook you up. But it doesn’t end with the ideas we’ve been sharing. God has so much more planned for us and for our ministry here. There is so much more to do to share the love of God here and around the world. It’s time to roll up our sleeves and dig in. Washing feet, handing out clothes, feeding the hungry, helping the children, housing the homeless, caring for the sick, visiting the lonely, sharing the good news, welcoming the stranger, reaching out and showing God’s love. If you can think it, you can name it. If you can name it, together we can do it. By the grace of God.

I have been talking for 10 minutes and I think you get the point. We are called to do – not just to think about faith and talk about love. We are called to love. We each are able to serve God with hands and feet – to care in practical purposeful tangible ways. There are a million different ways to do that, depending on your skills and abilities. We are encouraged to identify our gifts and to share them. We have a lot of jobs to do around the church and there are even more out in the community. Everything is not for everyone. Trust me – no one wants me climbing ladders and building bridges. But there are things I can do. There are many things you can do. And right now, God is calling you to serve.

So instead of continuing to talk, I’m going to invite you to talk to God and listen for God’s call. I want you to look at your own hands. And listen to God’s call for your hands and feet. Think about where your hands have been and what they have done – over the last week and over your entire lifetime. How have your hands reached out in love? Who have you touched? How have you cared? Have your hands held a smaller hand and helped them to grow? Have your hands carried a load to help someone else? What have you built or created? Have you soothed the sick or cared for the needy? Just in the last week, where have your hands reached? How have you touched? And here’s the key – in the week ahead – where will your hands reach and how will you touch with the love of God?

You are the hands and feet of Jesus. Where will you go? How will you serve? Whom will you touch? Together we are called to make a difference in the world, to show love, to share gifts. Imagine the reach of this congregation if we each did just one thing in the week ahead – just one act of love, just one gift of kindness. Imagine. And if we put our heads and hearts together, how could Jesus use us in the years ahead? How much love could God shower over the people around us?

Here's my last practical suggestion of the sermon. Each of you received a card on your way in. Or if you didn’t you can pick up a card on the way out. On your card I invite you to write one idea of some way this church could share God’s love in the world. Just one idea. And if you are willing to work on that idea, add your name to the card. Then drop your card in the offering plate as it passes. (as we leave). It may come to nothing. It may be too hard to pull off or too big a dream. Or there may be so many ideas that we can’t pull it all off. But on the other hand – this might just be God’s call today for this congregation to show the love of God in Christ Jesus our Savior. We are the hands and feet of Jesus. We are the heart and gift of God. Friends, children of God. Let us share the love of God wherever we go, by the grace of God. Amen.