**Moravian Day of Service**

**Sermon Notes**

**James 2:14-18: Faith and Deeds**

We often hear it said that the response “My prayers are with you”, is not enough when tragedy strikes. Yes, prayer is important, but that by itself is not adequate to help somebody who is in need. To simply pray for somebody’s house to be restored after a tornado has destroyed it does not help much. Praying for that family and then helping to raise funds to purchase building supplies or serving on a work crew that helps to erect the walls does. Prayer’s function is not primarily to urge God into action, but rather to align our priorities with God’s. Prayer should help us to move our faith into tangible action for the good of others.

This text from the letter of James gets to the heart of the matter when it comes to putting our faith into action. Yes, gathering as a community for worship is vitally important, Bible Studies and Christian Education must be done, setting aside time for prayer and meditation is crucial for deepening our awareness of God’s presence in our lives. But if each of those things does not cause us to look with compassion towards the suffering of others and motivate us to do something tangible to help alleviate that suffering, then we have missed the point.

In this passage from James we are being challenged to move beyond a “me and Jesus” faith to one that makes a difference not only for us but for those around us who are in need. Vital congregations are those that can balance the need for the spiritual growth of its current members while at the same time finding ways to serve and to give to needs that are present beyond our church walls.

**Matthew 25:31-40: Separation of Sheep and Goats**

In Jesus’ day flocks of sheep and goats could frequently be seen just beyond the limits of any small town or city if not strolling right down Main Street. It was an image that would have been as common for them as us seeing parking lots full of cars. Often times goats and sheep were kept in the same fold for simplicity sake, but there were also times when the sheep and goats would need to be separated (such as when it was time for shearing).

Jesus used this common image to illustrate just how important caring for others is in the kingdom of God. For Jesus, helping others is the primary criteria by which entrance into the kingdom of heaven is judged. This is the only passage in the Gospels in which Jesus does this which means we need to take a very careful look at it. While we in the church might hold church attendance, giving generously to the church budget, and living an upright life as high on the priority list, none of that appears on Jesus’ list. This does not mean that we should ignore supporting the church with time, effort, and financial support, but it does tell us that we must recognize the priorities that Jesus gives us for our daily living. This passage should also challenge us as a church to have our priorities in-line with Jesus’ priorities.

In this important passage, Jesus outlines the ways in which we can best be an answer to the prayer “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We must keep in mind that our motivation to serve others is not to earn our way into heaven or to be seen as big-hearted by others. More to the point, our motivation is to see the world through the compassionate eyes of Jesus and to do what we can to help others, just as Jesus did.

As Moravians we celebrate August 13, 1727 as the spiritual rebirth of our church, but the story did not end there. This movement of the Holy Spirit was followed by a period of intense focus on mission beyond the Herrnhut community. By 1732 (just 5 years later) the first missionaries were on their way to St. Thomas to bring the good news of God’s love to the enslaved population of that Caribbean island. And soon after that there were Moravians all over the world!

Questions for reflection in your sermon:

* How does your congregation’s budget reflect a priority to help others? Remember a part of your congregation’s support of the Provincial budget also goes to fund many outreach efforts including Board of World Mission initiatives around the world.
* Can you think of ways that Moravian or local church mission efforts over the years have fulfilled this balance of both inward spiritual growth while seeking to reach out and care for others?
* How can you highlight some of the community service opportunities that are available to members of your congregation? Here it is important to come up with things that a variety of people with different abilities can help with.
* How can we allow the Holy Spirit to move us beyond the walls of our church buildings to make a difference in the lives of those who are suffering down the street and across the globe?