

Sermon Ideas for the Moravian Day of Service Moravian Day of Service

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 essential, but that by itself is not adequate to help somebody who is in need. Simply praying for somebody’s house to be restored after a tornado has destroyed it does not help much. Praying for that family and helping raise funds to purchase building supplies or serving on a work crew that helps erect the walls does. Prayer’s function is not primarily to urge God into action but to align our priorities with God’s. Prayer should allow 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 essential, Bible Studies and Christian Education must be done, and 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 for us and 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 care for the 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 down Main Street. It was an image that would have been as common for them as us seeing parking lots full of cars. Often goats and sheep were kept in the same fold for simplicity's 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 familiar image to illustrate just how important caring for others is in the kingdom of God. For Jesus, helping others is the primary criterion by which entrance into the kingdom of heaven is judged. This is the only passage in the Gospels where Jesus does this, which means we must carefully consider 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 align our priorities with Jesus'.

In this important passage, Jesus outlines how we can best be an answer to the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We must remember that our motivation to serve others is not to earn our way into heaven or 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 an intense focus on mission beyond the Herrnhut community. By 1732 (just five 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 have fulfilled this balance of 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 suffering down the street and across the globe?