**Ministry Fair Sunday**

**The Feast of Pentecost**

June 8. 2014

Today we celebrate our annual Ministry Fair, and we also celebrate the completion of our first year of the Faith-Seeking Journey. It is a time when we recognize and honor all the ministries that **you** are so faithfully carrying out; a time when we recognize all who have faithfully completed a guided Faith-Seeking journey; *and* a time for us all to discern what ministries – or continuing ministries – God is calling each of us to **now**. You have the opportunity, after worship today, to ask those who are involved in particular ministries what those ministries are about, so that you might better discern what work God is calling you to engage in.

God not only calls us into ministry *individually*, but also *corporately*, as a church. There is no such thing as a Christian in isolation; we are all members of one body. “The eye can never say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you’”, St. Paul reminds us. (1 Corinthians 12:21) And we **truly** minister God’s love *through* our work as we are *filled* with God’s love and Holy Spirit, which we celebrate this Pentecost Day.

Many of you have heard of St. Benedict, the 6th-Century monk whose rule for life in community still forms the basis of so many religious communities today, and to whom we are indebted for our Prayer Book’s Morning and Evening Prayer services. A motto of the Benedictine tradition is “*ora et labora*” – “prayer and work”. Just as work is essential to the monastic life, so is *ministry* essential to *our* lives as members of Christ’s body, the Church. Jesus once said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.” (Luke 10:2; Matt. 9:37) Our ministries are answers to that prayer.

In the catechism at the back of our Prayer Book, we find this question and answer:

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

The Apostle James writes: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you *say* you have faith but do not have works? …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.” (James 2:16-17) Doing God’s ministry in the world gives life to our faith.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the crowd, saying (in a modern translation): “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your ***salt***iness, how will people taste ***god***liness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here’s *another* way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world…If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” (*The Message*)

Mother Theresa had another image of how God uses us. She said that we are “pencils in the hand of a writing God, who is sending love letters to the world.” Pencils in the hand of a writing God, who is sending love letters to the world. In other words, God expresses his love to the world *through us*! You and I are what God uses to communicate God’s love to the world – through our work of teaching Sunday School, leading worship, working at the Thrift House, serving as a C.A.S.A. volunteer, making salad for Mercy Today, serving as an usher, acolyte, or altar guild member, hosting Coffee Hour, taking communion to shut-ins, serving on the Board of Directors of a non-profit organization, praying faithfully, or simply being kind to the check-out person in the grocery store. One cannot write a love letter without a pencil, and God has chosen you and me to be his pencils by which his love letters are written to the world.

That makes our ministries extremely important, for what could be *more* important than God’s letters of love to the world?

So far, we have been looking at how important our ministries are to God’s work in the world. We have used the images of salt of the earth, light of the world, and pencils in the hand of a writing God. But Jesus says that salt can lose its flavor, a lantern can be put under a bucket. And we all know that a pencil can get so dull it will no longer write. We human beings, instruments of God’s work in the world, can be *good* instruments or *not-so-good* instruments. A hungry family goes to a soup kitchen and is fed soup and sandwiches, but the volunteer serving the food is so grumpy and short with the poor family that they certainly don’t feel the love of God. Yes, the family’s stomachs are filled, but has that volunteer at the soup kitchen done God’s ministry – conveyed God’s love? The volunteer may have done what our society calls “charity work”, but without a heart filled with and *conveying* charity or love, on the level of the spirit, it is not *Christian* ministry. The salt has lost its taste; the light has been put under a bushel; the pencil is dull. In true Christian ministry, **God** does the work *through* us, and therefore we must be instruments which God can use. God cannot shine his light out from the lantern if it is under a bushel. Salt will not flavor the world if that salt loses its taste. God cannot write love letters with dull pencils. It is *our* responsibility to be in fit shape, to keep ourselves sharpened and ready, so that God **can** use us to write love letters to the world.

How is it that we keep ourselves sharp and in good shape for God to use us? By constantly being renewed in daily prayer, regular worship, and in such **wonderful** gifts as the Faith-Seeking Journey, which completes its first year today.

Bishop O’Neill once led a very insightful Bible Study. He brought to our attention Jesus’ last instructions to his followers in the Gospel of Matthew, and compared them to Jesus’ last instructions to his followers in the Gospel of Luke. In **Matthew**, Jesus gives what has come to be called “The Great Commission”, sending his disciples into the world with these words: “***Go*** and make disciples of all nations.” It is a call to active ministry.

But in **Luke’s** Gospel, Jesus’ last instructions to his followers are this: “***Stay*** in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” In one place Jesus’ final instructions are, “Go!”, and in another place his final instructions are, “Stay!” With great insight, our bishop interpreted those two commands as **both** necessary. Jesus’ “Go” command is his commissioning his disciples to active ministry. But when Jesus tells the disciples, in Luke, to “stay in the city” (and he is speaking of the **Holy** City, Jerusalem, the place where God was thought to be present in the Temple), when Jesus tells them to stay in the city until they are clothed with power from on high, he is saying that they need to nourish themselves in prayer and worship, to be fed and filled with God’s Spirit. Luke tells us that after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples followed his instruction: they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” As we heard in this morning’s Gospel, it is ***as*** they are gathered in prayer that the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

The dual commands: stay, and go. *Ora et Labora*: prayer **and** work, renewal and service. Both are essential if we are to be used by God to do God’s work in the world. The Benedictines know that. Franciscan friar Richard Rohr knows that, for the ministry which he established is called “The Center for Action and Contemplation” – work and prayer. If they are not centered and grounded in prayer, our “good works” are likely done out of a sense of obligation, or in order to make **us** feel good about *ourselves*, feeding our self-image of being magnanimous and caring people **–** all of this on the unconscious level, of course. Jesus says, on the other hand, “Watch out that you don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others… When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—…calling attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

*Ora* **et** *labora*, prayer **and** work, worship **and** ministry: *both* are needed. For prayer and worship bring us into union with a loving God, and God’s love for us motivates us to listen to the call and claim he has on our lives. Our lives, after all, are not about us. Ministry which is performed with – and in – a loving, holy spirit is *truly* ministry, not simply good deeds done to bolster our egos. For it is God who is acting through us, not we ourselves.

And so it is that **all** our actions to serve others, when they are done in God’s love and spirit and not just out of obligation, or to make ourselves feel good about ourselves, **all** these actions, supported and daily renewed by prayer, are ministries, and we celebrate them **all** this day. Whether the church officially “sponsors” the ministry or whether you do it on your own, we *celebrate* that ministry today as a love letter written by God to God’s people, using you as a pencil.

And I **thank** you that you have kept yourself sharp and ready for God’s use, through regular prayer, and by being nourished in Word and Sacrament and fellowship along with your fellow members of the Body of Christ here at Christ Church. I thank each and every one of you for responding to God’s call on your life!

AMEN