

The Work of God

[Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

[John 6:24-35](#)

I recently called a carpet cleaner. I had three possible times to get the carpets in Jill's office cleaned and I was looking for someone who could come at one of those specific times. I started with a Los Osos company. Jerry answered and said "Now don't I know you?" I didn't think so but said that we had met when he had cleaned these carpets before. He paused and said something like, "You're the wife of so-and-so aren't you?" I confess to being a tad irritated and I brought the conversation back to when I needed him to come. Well he showed up a few days later, on time, even a little early and as I started to walk him through the office he stopped and said "How's the church going?" I was disarmed. He had bothered to work out who I am. I stopped focusing on the carpets and spent a little time getting to know Jerry and learning how things were for him post- pandemic.

Notice that there was a big difference in the way we approached each other – I was in transactional mode – I had something that needed doing and I wanted to know if he could do it. Jerry was in relational mode – he wanted to connect – he wanted to know me.

Jesus said to the crowd that tracked him down, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." I've been puzzling about this because we think of the feeding of the five thousand as a major sign of God in Jesus. These people didn't just see the sign they *lived* it, they ate it. So why is Jesus chiding them?

I think it's because they wanted Jesus to do something for them. They wanted him to be the baker. They wanted their carpets cleaned right now. But that's not what Jesus is offering. The bread is just a way to

show hospitality, to demonstrate God's reign – what Jesus is offering is relationship.

We often want God to do something for us. We want him to heal our loved one who is sick. We want him to end war. We want him to put bread on the table, keep a roof over our heads. As my friend once said, “When God answers my prayers, I’ll believe in him.” But what God wants with us is relationship. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” And elsewhere Jesus says, “Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

God wants a relationship with us. And yes in the context of that relationship God wants us to share our burdens and God wants us to co-create with her, but the relationship comes first.

Have you noticed how rarely Jesus answers a question? Today's gospel gives a great example of the way he changes the direction of the conversation – almost like a verbal Aikido – someone asks something and he deftly flips it over his shoulder and before you know it, the question lies unanswered on the floor. They said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” See the flip? They asked what *they* must do and he answered with what *God* is doing.

I imagine that they were wondering whether they too could learn to make a few loaves of bread stretch to feed thousands of people. It would be a wonderful gift to have in places where food is scarce. But Jesus doesn't go there. Instead he says that it is God working in them who enables them to believe in him. It is God working in them that enables them to engage in a relationship with God manifest in Jesus. It seems to me that when Jesus says to believe in him he isn't asking us to believe in something impossible, like the tooth fairy, rather he is inviting us into

relationship – believe that I am God, believe that I am alive, believe that I love you so we can get together, so that we can be friends and much more than friends.

It is God working in us who invites us into deeper and deeper relationship with Spirit however we experience God’s Spirit and whatever we call him, her or them. This is grace.

As I step back from my leadership position for a few months, I have been focusing on what needs to be done. Together with the wardens, the leadership team, the Parish Council, Jay and Susan+, I have been trying to make sure that everything will continue to happen that helps to sustain this community. I have been focused as it were on who will clean the carpets and when.

But my friends, that is not what’s really important.

What’s most important is relationship. God working in this congregation to call us into deeper relationship as the Body of Christ. God teaching us how to love one another. God teaching us how to love our neighbors. God teaching us how to let go of grievances, of anxiety, of fear because there is no place in the reign of God for these things and they get in the way of open-hearted, life affirming relationships.

In the New Testament reading, the passage from Ephesians, we heard a beautiful and inspiring vision of the church. We are all given different gifts to share, and together these build up the Body until all of us come “to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”. That’s where we are headed, people of God, we are headed to becoming fully Christ-like. God wants nothing less for each of us as individuals and for us as a faith community. We are headed to a place where when people look at St. Benedict’s they are looking at Christ.

That’s not something that will be achieved by brilliant organization. Indeed, to talk of “achieving” is not quite right. It’s not practicing and practicing and then winning the gold medal of Christ-likeness. No, it is

allowing the Spirit to work in our hearts and lives, it is ever-deepening relationship with God.

Ephesians says “...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.”

We often interpret “speaking the truth in love” as giving us the right to criticize each other’s behavior. I honestly doubt that that’s what the writer had in mind. The truth is that God is working in us, the truth is that God loves us unconditionally, the truth is that in the reign of God we support one another in love.

People of God, while I am away I will be praying for you and missing you. I will be praying that you continue to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.”

Stef teased me, saying that when I come back y’all will be telling me, “Oh we don’t do it like that here.” I can’t wait to see how we do “do it” in November. I can’t wait to see the miracles that God will be doing in our midst. I can’t wait to meet the new people and hug the old people. Even in my physical absence I continue to be part of this expression of Christ and it gives me joy to witness to God’s powerful energy working here.

God is calling us to new things. Let’s not get caught up in who’s going to clean the carpets or empty the dishwasher. Instead, let us pay attention to the prompting of God’s Spirit and focus on building up the Body of Christ.

Let us pray:

Holy One, we thank you for your desire to be in relationship with us. We ask that you will enable us, the people of St Benedict's, to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. May we use the gifts you have given us for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

And may the grace of God fill our hearts and our lives. Amen