

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Doing God's work. That may sound like a very unmotivating sermon title. A few weeks ago I picked the title along with hymns for Pastor Doug, and when I came back to it this week to prepare the sermon I wondered what in the world I was thinking. When I dug into the readings again I discovered a gem.

Doing God's work. It's hidden in the Gospel we read. Jesus had fed the 5000 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and went off with his disciples to rest. The crowds that had been fed wanted more of Jesus and crossed the lake to the other side where they found him. Jesus, knowing their thinking, made it clear to them. ***"You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs – and for free."*** (Peterson, The Message) You are thinking of yourselves, not God, what you can get from God, for yourselves. But Jesus was not being sarcastic. He revealed the truth of their thoughts in order to invite them to feed on the food that does not perish, the food that he, the Son of Man, would give them. They totally misunderstood him and asked the question, ***"What must we do to perform the works of God."*** Jesus invited them to take him into themselves and they thought it was some outward work they had to do.

Are we any different when it comes to doing God's work? It is so natural for us, like the crowds around Jesus, to see God's work as performance that benefits ourselves, makes us feel good and keep pursuing God for more. We see God's work as outward acts like going to church, helping our neighbour, doing acts of kindness, giving to the poor and third world countries. Wait a minute! If this isn't God's work, what is? This is Jesus answer. ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."***

Still the crowds did not perceive the Christ in their midst. "Give us a sign," they said, "like the manna from Moses in the wilderness. Prove yourself to us." Jesus couldn't have replied more clearly. ***"It was my Father, not Moses, who gave the manna from heaven . . . For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*** Naturally the crowd said. ***"Give us this bread always."*** To which Jesus replied, ***"I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*** I can see Jesus looking into the eyes of the crowd, his eyes inviting recognition from the crowd that he was the bread sent by God – but there was none for he said to them. ***"But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe."*** You are not doing the work of God.

Are our lives the work of God or are they the work of Robert, Mary, Peter, Joe, Jane, Mike, Linda, etc. The second reading today is God's word through the pen of Paul teaching us the way of faith, to do God's work. The apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* give this description of the apostle Paul. "a man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining and a nose somewhat hooked, full of grace: for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel." (Illustrated Bible Dictionary, V3, page 1166, Tyndale) Picture Paul, a prisoner with privileges because his work for God showed and he was trusted, writing to the church at large. ***"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,"*** Me called? Yes me, and you also. Called in baptism to live a new life

every day, called in the Lord's Supper to love one another as Christ loves us, called in Paul's words, ***“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.”*** This is God's work. Is this the flavour of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada? Is this the flavour of Zion Evangelical Lutheran congregation? Do we resonate as ***“one body, one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all”***? 7 'ones' to describe the work of God which characterizes the people of God. We can say. “That was then, but that's not now.” “How can we say that when we have so many different churches?” All these churches are our work, not God's work. Thank God that God still does God's work among them. Paul writes that God gives to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip us saints. ***“for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”*** This is God's work just as active today as it was on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Some years ago, Gordon Thomas, born in Palestine, an honours graduate in Scripture in England, returned to the Middle East as a foreign correspondent, wrote a book called *The Trial, the Life and Inevitable Crucifixion of Jesus*. He poured through over 100 resources, studied the behaviour of Roman law and Jewish law and the people of Jesus time. Jesus was most definitely real, he concluded, and so was his trial. What was Jesus life to him? All his research and study brought this simple conclusion. Jesus life is an invitation to trust, the very words of Jesus in the gospel reading, ***“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”*** This is the work of God, to believe, to put trust in the truth of God brought to us in Christ. It is this believing that frees our lives and leads us into living that can only be attributed to the presence of God in our lives.

The choice we have is refuse God's invitation and do our own work. King David did this in today's first reading. We know the story. David, chosen by God to be Israel's king, anointed by Samuel to make of Israel great nation God's witness to the world. David, enjoying his blessing, lusted for the beautiful wife of Uriah, his Hittite general. He took Bathsheba, raped her, making her pregnant. To cover up he put Uriah into a battle in which he would lose his life. Then he married Bathsheba, scot free in what he had done because he was the king appointed by God. God sent Nathan, a prophet, who through a parable asked David, ***“Why have you despised the word of the Lord?”*** ***“I have sinned against the Lord.”***, David confessed. We may not lay claim to David's sin but whenever we refuse God's invitation to believe the truth of our lives with God and the work of God that redeems them we despise the word of the Lord and need to repent. The path to repentance is to hear Christ's invitation to do God's work to believe the One Whom God has sent.

Psalm 51, the Psalm we shared today is considered to be David's prayer of repentance. David's sin was not without pain. The child he conceived with Bathsheba died and David's house would never be without strife. The Psalm clearly reveals David knowing his sin to the core of his being, his plea for God to remove his sin, and the prayer we sang so often in worship as an offertory, ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”*** etc. Why those who chose the Psalm for this day chose to stop at verse 12 puzzles me, because this is David's response to God's forgiveness. ***“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”*** This is what doing God's work does with us. Amen.