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Luke 4:14-21

Does What We Do Matter?

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Luke 4:14-21 New Revised Standard Version

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Last week at this time I was with 18 other folks from Greenland Hills in Juarez, Mexico. We were building homes for two families: Jorge, Erika, their five children, and Erika’s mom Martina and the Salas family. While we were there, Charlotte Lawton, who was our Spanish interpreter, helped us get to know Rebecca and her two kids. Rebecca’s dad had helped her build the walls of a home a year ago, but then he lost his job and couldn’t afford to continue. Rebecca’s house had been sitting empty for over a year. So, Judy Kline passed the hat and we pooled our cash. We were able to give Rebecca the $500 she needed to build the roof and the floor so that she and her family could have a home.

What we do matters to God. After we blessed the homes and laid hands on them praying with the families that their new home would be a blessing for them, we drove to the memorial that was built in Kathleen Baskin-Ball’s memory. The memorial said in loving memory of our sister pastor neighbor and sister in Christ of this community. Hermana pastora, sister pastor. I love that. The street is named after Kathleen and as we looked around we saw all of the homes that Kathleen and the churches she had served had been a part of building.

For many of you, Juarez seems far away. You are thinking of your family member who was in a car wreck, or your neighbor who is struggling with drug addiction, or you are thinking of yourself who feels so distant from God. Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, to the captive, to the blind, and to the oppressed. Jesus says he has come for the powerless and for the outcast. Just a few weeks ago we remembered Jesus’ baptism and we celebrated our own baptism. We remembered the heavens being ripped open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove telling Jesus, “You are my Son, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.” And God tells us, you are my son, you are my daughter, my beloved, with you I am well pleased. That is who we are. And we are called to live out that call and that claim on our lives.

In 1739 about 10 people came to John Wesley, the first Methodist, and they wanted to spend time in prayer with each other. They wanted some wisdom from Mr. Wesley about how to flee from the wrath to come which they felt was hanging over their heads.[[1]](#footnote-2) So, John Wesley got out his cell phone and scheduled a weekly appointment with these folks. They met Thursday evenings, and they invited others to come. They would share about their joys and their concerns and end their small group time together in prayer. It was a group of people seeking the power of godliness, united to pray together, to be encouraged, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.[[2]](#footnote-3) The only condition to joining one of these societies or groups was “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.” And they would know if it was fixed in their soul by their fruits. By their actions they would know their salvation.

So, they would show their desire of salvation by following the three General Rules. Number one: do no harm. And you do no harm by avoiding evil of every kind. Rule number two: do good. Doing good to people’s bodies, giving food to the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting or helping those that are sick or in prison. Rule number three: grow closer to God. Come to worship, receive Communion, pray, read your Bible, fast.

There is a great saying, it is called the Wesley Rule, that since 1904 has been attributed to John Wesley, the first Methodist. There is no evidence that John Wesley said these words, but after you hear the three General Rules, what is called the Wesley Rule seems to just make sense. “Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.”

And when Jesus reads the scroll from the prophet Isaiah, he reminds us that God gives special attention to those whom the world doesn’t want to see.[[3]](#footnote-4) This week the Oscars has been in the news because of the lack of African American actors who were nominated. And some prominent African American actors said that they were going to boycott. And then, one of my loving relatives said that we should all boycott the BET Awards. I asked this loving relative if they had ever watched the Black Entertainment Awards and she had not. And it reminded me of the Black Lives Matter movement. Some wanted to change it and say, All Lives Matter, and they would say we need to focus on everyone. And I agree, all lives do matter, but the Black Lives Matter movement is about calling attention to the fact that the way our world and culture acts makes us think that we have collectively decided that black lives *don’t* matter, at least not as much as white ones do.[[4]](#footnote-5)

When a house is on fire, you direct the firefighters to that house. That does not mean that you are saying that all of the other houses in the neighborhood don’t matter. You are saying that this house is on fire and it needs attention.[[5]](#footnote-6) I can imagine after Jesus put down that scroll the people in that synagogue felt mighty uncomfortable. Jesus is reminding them that God wants us to focus on those the world has overlooked, forgotten or discarded.

My friend Wes Magruder is the pastor at Kessler Park UMC and right now he is on the Greek island of Lesvos helping refugees who are fleeing violence in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. He is currently working the night shift signaling passing boats, helping them get to shore and providing warmth and comfort. Last night there were 1500 refugees but there are only room for 400 people in the tents. It was 26 degrees. Two days ago 42 people drowned when two boats capsized in the Aegean Sea, many were children. And people on a sinking boat were rescued last night. The bus filled with 50 freezing and soaked men, women and children arrived at the shelter and a woman weakly came down the stairs of the bus whispers help me as she handed a volunteer her baby. As the woman lets go of her baby, she falls down. There were fears of hypothermia as the volunteers saw blue toes and fingers, but by the end of the night no one was seriously injured or harmed.

Changing the world and offering comfort to those who have no home is rarely if ever a safe endeavor. Offering hospitality to those whom the world rejects is rarely, if ever, convenient. When you follow Jesus, life isn’t easier. Following Jesus makes you courageous, it makes you speak out against injustice, racism, sexism, homophobia, and hate.

We have to take risks. But it seems like we only take risks when we are desperate. On Christmas Eve we have two worship services. At the 7 pm service, Robert started playing the piano and Kristi went to get the lighter to light the altar candles. But it wouldn’t work! It had worked at 5 pm worship just fine, but Kristi could not get it to light. We began to sign Veni, Veni, Veni, the song we sang during Advent. We were singing about Christ coming and we could not light the candles to show that Christ was here! Pastor Stefanie, our wonderful Intern, ran to the kitchen to see if she could find some matches, and she came back with the acolyte candle lighter lit! She had gone to the kitchen, and seen some folks who were drinking coffee as they waited for the Narcotics Anonymous meeting. Stefanie had invited them to Christmas Eve worship and then they had lit her candle lighter. We were all forced to take a risk and as some of those wonderful folks joined us for worship, we found an opportunity to be in ministry with each other. What we do matters to God. Amen.

1. <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/general-rules-of-the-methodist-church> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/general-rules-of-the-methodist-church [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2016/01/epiphany-3-c-a-peculiar-power/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.davidlose.net/2016/01/epiphany-3-c-a-peculiar-power/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://www.davidlose.net/2016/01/epiphany-3-c-a-peculiar-power/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)