

“Do the Good that is Yours to Do”

Luke 3:7-16 & Isaiah 58:9b-12

Pastor James York

December 15, 2024

Prayer for Understanding Listening God, we know that you are constantly speaking to us. Through music, scripture, nature, and relationships, you make yourself known again and again. In gratitude, we long to return the favor. So in this moment, we are quieting the noise in our heads. We are leaning in. We are listening. We are doing the good that is ours to do. Speak to us through the chaos with hope in our hearts we listen, amen.

The world will change into a glorious place for all by you doing the good that is yours to do and others joining us in doing good. Brian McLaren writes: “This hot-mess world needs changing, and there are beautiful, unique contributions that only you can make. Your life will be so much more full and meaningful for making them... You are changing the world.”

David LaMotte has studied positive change throughout history and concludes: To effectively address large scale problems, you need a lot of people to move in the same direction and do a little bit each. David contends that this is always how large scale change happens, a lot of people, each doing a little. David could not find one instance of one person solving a major issue despite this being the plot line of many of our stories and the claim of several politicians. God is transforming the world by constantly calling people to love, so the entire cosmos will be redeemed, so heaven will be enjoyed on earth. God is blessing all people. Blessed people are called to bless others which multiplies the blessings so all will be blessed, loved, and whole. Jesus sought to solve problems, to make people whole, to make earth a loving paradise, not on his own, rather by making disciples then asking those disciples to make more disciples and on and on, so the world is full of loving people, each doing their small part, which when put together makes all glorious.

David explains that everything you do changes the world. So which changes will you make? When you hear horrible news, focus, and decide what piece you want to work on. What is tugging on your heart right now? Find your people. Where are others that care about what you care about? Find them and join them. Decide to do something in the next two weeks. Small things compounded with others over time make a monumental difference. Learn and repeat. Keep doing something every two weeks. Combat powerlessness by pursuing small, achievable actions alongside fellow changemakers. Your love will expand the goodness of the world forever.

The gospel of Luke proclaims: **Luke 3:7-16 NLT** “When the crowds came to John for baptism, John said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Do not just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Sarah and Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham and Sarah from these very stones. Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.” The crowds asked, “What should we do?” John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.” Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?” John replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.” “What should we do?” asked some soldiers. John replied, “Do not extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.” Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. John answered their

questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

John does not endorse the hero narrative. John does not say wait and Jesus will come and fix all. John says being religious means nothing if you are not lovingly doing good. John proclaims that everyone repent, change, love, do the good that is theirs to do. Jesus is coming. Jesus will baptize with the fire of the Holy Spirit, inspiring, motivating, empowering, love. When loving people come together God multiplies their love yielding a transformation that will redeem the cosmos.

John paints a bleak picture of our current situation, we are snakes, people who spew fear, hate, oppression, and violence. Some are overwhelmed and are numb. Some have lost hope and do nothing. Some are comfortable and distance themselves from the needs of others. Some are in denial and are unaware. Thankfully, some come to God asking, “What should we do?” God is transforming the world through those who lovingly do good. Seasons when a majority of people fail to lovingly do good are seasons of wrath. Jesus is coming to inspire individuals to lovingly do good, to weave these do gooders in community and through loving community Jesus will establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

When John the Baptist responds to the crowds, he reminds everyone to give to those in need and to not live with excess. To the tax collectors, those who often deceive and take advantage of others for their own financial gain, to them, John commands fairness and economic justice. To the soldiers, the representatives of Roman power, to them John rebukes any misuse of power and control calling out the specific practices of extortion and false accusation. John the Baptist’s calls for repentance are concerns about economic disparities, abuses of power, and people failing to love. In what ways are we as a community, nation, and world called to repent of these sins? When you consider the good that is yours to do, in what ways can your actions foster economic and social justice? In what ways can you use your power for good?

God desires to redeem the world today. God is pure love so will not control or force someone to change. Love honors free will. And God is actively loving in each person’s life hoping to inspire us to love, to do the good that is ours to do, so the world will become a glorious, loving place now.

As John the Baptist was teaching about bearing good fruit, the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers ask John, “What, then, should we do?” John’s answer to each group is slightly different, but ultimately the same: “Do the good that is yours to do.” John harshly denounces the perpetrators of economic disparities and John also provides them paths for redemption for even they have good that is theirs to do. In this week’s story, it is significant that we hear the same question asked three times: “What, then, should I do?” Sometimes we may be too daunted by the enormity of the world’s problems to respond. Remember small, ordinary actions add up. It makes a difference when you are kind to a person who is lonely, when you compost, when you show up to a rally, or when you go to therapy and do not pass on generational trauma. You cannot solve all the world’s problems, but you can do something that matters. We each have something to offer and no one can solve all the problems. When we come together, each person providing their goodness we complete the loving world community. Trust that others have the pieces that you do not have, when put together everyone will be able to fully experience God bringing heaven to earth. What is yours to do? We can each bear good fruit through acts of justice and righteousness. We can all be what Isaiah calls “repairers of the breach” by satisfying the needs of the afflicted.

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah. **Isaiah 58:9b-12 NLT “Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry**

and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as the repairer of the breach, the restorer of homes.”

Isaiah invites us to bring forth restoration through ordinary actions: feeding the hungry, serving the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted. It is about the cumulative power of small acts that weave together creating a fabric of communal flourishing.

The prophet Micah proclaims: **Micah 6:8 “God has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”** Rabbi Rami Shapiro’s interpretive translate is, “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.” What is holding you back from taking these words to heart? Consider your unique gifts, perspectives, talents, and resources. How might these uniquely situate you to move into action in your everyday life?

Isaiah urges us to “remove the yoke,” creating a ripple effect of restoration, impacting the generations that come after us. How will your good works contribute to interdependent systems of mutual flourishing?

Isaiah gives us three images. First, when one fails to do good, they live in darkness. If anyone in the world is hungry, homeless, manipulated, enslaved, oppressed, excluded imprisoned, lonely or distraught then everyone experiences darkness. When anyone lovingly does good, then light shines from them, as more people do good, the light grows and grows eventually shining as bright as the sun. God illuminates the world through a multitude of people doing small acts of goodness.

Second, when one fails to do good, their love bends in on their self, they become brackish, parched, and exhausted. When one lovingly does good, God opens streams of living water within the do gooder invigorating them, making them an ever-flowing stream for others, an ever-flowing stream for the earth creating lush gardens and orchards abundant with produce and fruit for all.

Third, when one fails to do good, fear, hate, division, violence and destruction destroys cities, forms breaches and burns homes. When one lovingly does good God enables them to rebuild communities, repair the breaches, bridge every divide and repair homes.

In all three illustrations, humanity is not passive. God does not do all the work. God eagerly invites people to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be filled with love, joy, hope, peace, and grace, to discover that they are beloved, blessed, and favored, to utilize their unique gifts lovingly doing good, to come together and journey with others and then God will supernaturally multiple the goodness to redeem the cosmos and every person making all glorious for eternity.

In the overwhelm of daily responsibilities and the barrage of global crises, it is easy to feel like anything we do or say is simply a drop in the ocean. Yet, in this season of expectant hope, we are reminded that the good we do in the world has ripple effects beyond what we can see. We are invited to ask: “What is mine to do?” We are all called to participate in God’s restorative story—a love set in motion with creation. Each good work, no matter how small, is a thread in the fabric of God’s ongoing creation story where love always finds a way, grace heals, peace prevails, joy abounds and abundant life emerges. Your efforts, though they might seem modest, are part of a larger, divine tapestry. The cumulative goodness of small acts weaves together people with the cosmos enabling all to flourish.

Harvest a poem by Sarah Speed: Maybe none of it matters. Maybe you cannot make a difference. Or maybe that watermelon seed you spit out over the summer will grow into a green orb, full of sticky sweet fruit. Maybe the rain will nourish it. Maybe your mother’s hands will pull it from the vine, slice it into wedges, and place it on the dining room table. Maybe the neighbors will come over and chomp into that soft pink fruit, juicy water running down their chins. Maybe you will laugh at the shared experience,

at this garden-grown communion, and maybe the stars will shine brighter that night. People say the problems of the world are too big to make a difference, but surely those people have forgotten the fruit that grows from one little seed.

Do the good that is yours to do. Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it. Let us join the crowd asking, "What should I do?" Find the good that is yours to do and do it. God is filling you with the Holy Spirit so you can grow in receiving love and grow in sharing love and that loving goodness will make the world glorious.

A blessing by Kayla Craig: "You are uniquely situated to bring light into the world. May you find courage this season to do the good that is yours to do. It matters. May you see the ripples of your actions expand outward, touching lives and mending the fabric of our shared humanity." Amen