

ARE YOU READY TO GET BLISTERS FOR JESUS? A SERMON FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY
*COMMITTED TO CHRIST:
SIX STEPS TO A GENEROUS LIFE*
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
OCTOBER 20, 2013
TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

MATTHEW 25:31-45

The parable of the great judgment, of the separation of the sheep from the goats, of the righteous and the unrighteous, was the text that I chose to preach from on the Sunday that I retired, almost two years ago. I consider it the greatest text in the Bible to inspire us to be involved in the service of others, in the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is a powerful text. It has motivated my ministry in every church I have ever served. If I came to a church, and it wasn't serving people, serving the community, reaching out in some way, well, I got it started moving in that direction. And, as with this church, if I came to a church and it was ministering to the poor, the needy, the hungry, the homeless, I became a cheer-leader, a supporter, a fan, of that ministry.

I'm proud to serve a church that feeds the hungry. Your food pantry ministry serves over a thousand people a month. It is no accident that we're taking the food pantry offering today. God planned it that way.

I want to applaud, to praise, those who volunteer for the food pantry. Do you realize that around 10% of the active (actual) membership of this church is involved in the food pantry? Folks come in on Tuesday and bag groceries to be distributed on Wednesday, and then they come in on Wednesday to pass the food out to those who need it. And I want to say a special thank you to those who are members of the Fire and Iron Motorcycle Club, and to the JC Riders Motorcycle Club, for they come and unload the trucks when the groceries are delivered. They do the hard work and the heavy lifting. We need to have a Sunday when we honor and recognize them, because without them, we'd be hard-pressed to continue the food pantry. Most of our folks are either too old, or too busy, to be able to come and unload a truck or two every week.

That's been the story of every church I've ever served. Folks are too old or too busy to volunteer to carry on the ministry of the church.

Now there are as many different ways of volunteering and serving as there are people. Those who sing in the choir volunteer their time and talents, and add greatly to our worship service. Those who volunteer their time and talents to teach Sunday school do as well.

Those who volunteer to help with the Wednesday after school program are important too.

Now I want to talk to you about that this morning. I had two meetings for volunteers to help with that program. Two people came to the first one. No one came to the second one. Most folks would have dropped the program right there. Most preachers, leaders, would have said, "Well, if they don't want to help with this program, if they don't want to provide Christian Education to their children and grand-children, that's fine. I've got other ways I can spend my time." But I'm stubborn. And I knew that if we offered the children of this church an opportunity, they'd respond. And they have. We've topped twenty a time or two. And I've got some committed volunteers who are there every week. And they are mostly high school and even middle school

students, who help on the playground, and who watch the children, and who do whatever is needed.

And there have been a dedicated corps of ladies who have brought refreshments, for these kids are hungry for a snack when we bring them inside off the playground.

And they are hungry to learn. They enjoy learning Bible stories. They enjoy singing Christian songs with Valerie Marlow, our Church Administrator, who comes over and plays the piano after her work day is finished.

Larrian Bedini and Bev Hinson are my main-stays. They are the "adult presence" that allows me to play with the kids. Larrian's the one who will take over for me, when I'm gone. And Melissa Krebeck is our arts and crafts person right now, volunteering her time.

One Wednesday, when I was out of town, John and Alma Milton took charge, and ran the whole program.

Several folks have asked me 'who's in charge?' I guess I am. You've got a 66 year old, overweight, arthritic, retired, interim, Presbyterian minister, doing children's ministry.

Why? Because if I wasn't doing it, no one else would. And because I sincerely believe that when Jesus told us that even as we do it to the least of these my children, you do it unto me.

The choir of the Arcadia church used to sing an anthem, particularly on Sundays when we baptized babies, "I See Jesus in the Face of Every Child." I'm not sure I've reached that point yet, but I want to show Jesus to every child. I want to present Jesus to every child. I want to introduce Jesus to every child. I want every child to know Jesus not just as Lord and Savior, but as a friend to whom they can turn in time of trouble.

OK, I want you to know that I've helped unload the trucks. Until Jack Peacock and Scott Yant told me to get out of the way and go sit down. And now I've done the after school program, and I will until I have to get out of the way and go sit down.

But I don't ever want to hear from anyone that they are too old, too weak, or too busy to find something to do in the church.

In days gone by, we Presbyterians solved problems by throwing money at them. Need a children's program? Hire someone to do it. Need a youth program? Hire someone to do that? Need someone to visit the sick and the elderly? Hire a minister of visitation. I've known churches that had paid choirs. And paid Sunday School teachers.

Those days are past. The money isn't there in any church I know to pay choir members and Sunday school teachers. And the money isn't there in this church to hire a Director of Christian Education or a Youth Minister or a Minister of Visitation...

Jesus doesn't just call us to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, the imprisoned, the lonely. Jesus calls us to be the body of Christ in the world, and individually members of it.

If the church is the body of Christ, and we are individually members of it, then each member has a role to play, each member has something to do; each member has a gift to use.

I don't know your gifts. I don't know what role you would choose to play. I don't know what part of the body you are. But just as the body is made up of many parts and each is important, so are each and every one of you important.

Now not everyone is ready to get blisters for Jesus. That is a borrowed, suggested title by the way. I worked for four years with those who were ready to get blisters for Jesus. The community where I served the Lord for twenty odd years was devastated by the hurricanes of 2004. And for the next four years, volunteers from as far away as Maine and California came to Arcadia, Florida to help rebuild. Some were skilled craftsmen. Some were teenagers who had never even touched a hammer or a saw. Not all of them were Presbyterians. We had Amish and Mennonite volunteers living in our church office building one summer! We corrupted those Amish boys by teaching them how to use power tools! And the Amish girls discovered make-up and electric hair dryers!

I know folks from here went to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. And I know you've sent money to help in most every major crisis or disaster. Last week, we asked for your commitment of money, for your financial commitment to the life and ministry of this church.

Today, we ask for your commitment of something more precious: your commitment of time, of talent, of your gifts, of your presence.

I heard a preacher say once that God only asks for a tithe of our money, just a tenth. But God wants a seventh of our time. But today, we ask not for a day of rest, nor for an hour of worship, nor for an hour of prayer or Bible study. We ask for your service, your time, your talents, your presence.

For even as we do it unto the least of these, we do it unto him who calls us to be his servant people...