

Proper 13, Year B
August 4, 2024

What must we do to perform the works of God?

I believe we have all been put on this earth to perform the works of God, to be the hands and feet, eyes, words and actions of God. I believe God created each one of us to be in relation with God and with one another. In the words of the author of Ephesians, God begs us 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.

Again, in the words we hear in Ephesians, when Christ ascended, he made captivity itself captive and gave gifts to his people; the gifts we receive are freedom from fear, freedom from the bonds of death; darkness turned to light; and love: nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can hold us captive: we are free. We are free to love one another without fear, we are free to live whatever life God calls us to live, we are free to show mercy without fear of being called weak, we needn't worry about who will be bigger or stronger or richer or greater than we are, we are free to show our vulnerability and walk with God in humility.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

It is more blessed to give than to receive, we are taught even as children; as we grow older, we discover that sometimes it is *easier* to be the giver than the receiver. Gift-giving carries with it a message of "I care about you" without having to say anything more: wedding, anniversary, shower, birthday – all gifts that say, "you are important to me." In contrast, being on the receiving end of things can be difficult, sometimes embarrassing: oh, you shouldn't have; I didn't bring you a gift; that's so expensive, I could never accept that. As we approach the season of stewardship, thoughts of what can I do in return for St

Thomas and Grace which has done so much for me, what can I afford to give back, should I volunteer for an additional ministry? An interesting thing about giving and receiving is that when we give, we receive thanks; when we receive, we feel we need to give something in return as thanks for what we have been given. Giver and receiver dance together in an ever-expanding dialogue with one another and with God. What must we do to perform the works of God? the disciples ask Jesus. Let us pray for discernment to discover what role God desires for us, the role that will not only delight us but also feed the hungry world. As we wander in the desert, fleeing from a life of bondage, we are children not yet acquainted with trust in God or our role as workers of God's will. We remember with regret that even under the horrifying despotism of a slave-owner, we had shelter, we had food, we had water; our surroundings were familiar, we knew our place: life was simple. As we wander deeper and deeper into the wilderness, we are driven by fear and doubt. But slowly, our trust in God begins its journey into our hearts when our cries for food are heard and bread from heaven and birds of the air rain down on us. God then gives the Law for our safety and security, teaching us how we can maintain the bonds of community in peace.

In the Gospel of John, we are again children in the wilderness of a land where the strong and mighty oppress us; Jesus feeds us with bread and fish, but more than that. It was Moses who sent you the bread from heaven in the wilderness, says Jesus. The work you perform for God is to believe in the *true* bread which God sends to you from heaven. I am that true bread, says Jesus: if you come to me, you will never again feel hunger or thirst. The gift I give to the world is life.

Jesus gives to each of us our roles as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. No job is too small to equip us for the work of ministry, 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. We will always be challenged by wildernesses of oppression; may we always look to the Creator to tell us what we can do to perform the works of

God. May we never be the oppressors, forcing people to believe, punishing those who don't think as we do, ostracizing those who look different, or mocking cultures unlike ours. But instead may we work together in love and with gentleness, patience, humility and vulnerability towards a fuller understanding of what it means to never hunger or thirst again.