

What Will Our Faith Do?

Amos 5:21-24

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Is worship something we do out of habit? Is it an item on our calendar, a check mark on our to-do list?

Is faith a personal treasure that connects us with God to ensure our salvation?

Or are both of these meant to be something more?

It seems this is not a new question. Rather, perhaps for as long as people have existed, there have been questions about the role of faith, of religion, of church in our lives.

And too often, too many people have lived with the faith tucked in their pocket, let out on Sunday morning or at their appointed time of weekly worship, but then tucked back away as they walked out of the building and went on with their lives.

And yet, our faith is meant to be so much more. It is meant to shape us. It is meant to transform us. It is meant to live with us in the midst of this wonderful, confusing, amazing, sometimes terrible world. And with that faith, we are meant to make a difference in the world.

The prophets were certainly clear about this.

Amos speaks to a nation in the midst of prosperity and security, where affluence and expansion abounded. But a nation in which the needs of so many people, especially the most vulnerable were neglected. And, on behalf of God, Amos reminds the people that all their religious rituals and faith gatherings meant nothing if they didn't cause them to work for justice and to live with compassion and to demand equity.

And Amos' voice is not alone. Micah is a favorite prophet of many in our midst. And in Micah, chapter 6, we hear the question, "With what shall I come before the Lord" (Micah 6:6a, NRSV) and a list of examples of various gifts and offerings. But the answer is simply this, "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8b, NRSV).

Friends, our faith doesn't only ask, doesn't only suggest, but demands that we live lives of compassion, justice, and love. Our faith demands that we live in ways that make better the lives of those who are oppressed, who are abused, who are suffering.

And if we open our eyes and look around, if we open our ears and listen, we will find a world in need of care and compassion.

Just a week or two ago, I received this email from someone in the church. She wrote, " I'm dealing with a lot right now. A LOT. I'm grieving for the death of my country. I'm grieving for the loss of my relationship (however bad it was) with my brother. I'm grieving the loss of a part of myself that

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believed in people. And I'm grappling right now with my relationship with God. I'm also dealing with a deep fear of what's to come--for mine and my mother's very survival. I'm also having to deal with day to day caregiving duties. Paying bills doesn't stop. Calling doctors' offices doesn't stop. None of it stops. I'm trying to put one foot in front of the other. I'm trying my best to have hope, to be cheerful, to take whatever pleasure I can from life."

Friends, there are so many people in need of compassion.

A few weeks ago Kara attended the Food for Thought & Action event at the Coralville Food Pantry. That pantry, only one of several in our community/here with us this morning distributed a million pounds of food in 2023. And Kara learned that while on average they sign up about 25 new families every week, one week recently signing up even more. The North Liberty Food Pantry is building a new building to respond to the growth in households they serve and just a few years ago CommUnity also expanded.

Friends, there are so many people struggling with food insecurity in our own community.

In a reflection on a recent trip of Disciples college students to the United States/Mexico border, Anna Whittle, one of the participants wrote, "One of my fellow students posed a question that stayed with us throughout the rest of the trip: 'If we tore down the wall, would our ideologies even change?' Standing face-to-face with that barrier made this question painfully real. The wall represents far more than a physical divide - it embodies the fear, exclusion, and the rigid boundaries we've built in our minds and hearts. As I stood there, within arm's reach of the wall, I realized how close we are, and yet, how divided we remain....but standing there, it [also] became clear that real people live on these streets" (<https://annawhittle.substack.com>).

Friends, there are so many opportunities to see people, not as the other, but as God's beloved children.

And the list goes on. Earlier in our worship service we heard about the needs - food and housing, safety and security, medical care and connecting to the community across barriers of culture and language. We know too well the truths of violence visited upon women and children, of hard working people still having to choose between food and medicine, of opportunities lost because of the color of a person's skin or their documentation status, of LGBTQ+ youth being kicked out of their homes.

The list of ways that people are suffering and struggling is long.

And the challenge for us is the question: what will our faith do about it? How do the convictions of our faith convict us to really mean what we said earlier when we responded with the words, "And so we commit..."

Friends, we are called, not to empty rituals or habitual faith practices, but to encounter God so that we may be changed. And, in being changed we are called to go and make a difference in the world, feeding the hungry, housing the unhoused, visiting the lonely, connecting with the pushed aside, and to fight for a world where all people are valued and all people can thrive. Our faith invites us to not only sit by in hopes that God will act, but to live in the world in a way that makes real the dream that

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“justice [will] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24, NRSV). May it be so.