

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC
Danvers, MA
Rev. Kevin M Smith
December 16, 2018
Luke 3:10-18

What Then Shall We Do?

“We share God’s love, hope, and healing and serve our neighbors.” This is God’s calling and purpose to you and me sisters and brothers. May we practice and share this Good News that our “still speaking” God has given us. May it be so.

To every thing there is a season, and time to every purpose under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Indeed there is. All the moments of my life and all the moments of your lives have brought us together today—in this sacred place, in this time for this moment. All of our lives God has been nudging us along our pathways has brought us together in this time of worship to be with one another. Every twist and turn in our journeys, every nudge of God’s quiet voice in our ears, meandered through our individual and collective journeys to this day. Praise God from who all blessings flow.

God has blessed me these past eight years to be your pastor and teacher. You have blessed me with your love, care, and support. I am and will always be eternally grateful to God and to you for our time together. You have brought joy and meaning to my life and my life’s work. Never once have I regretted the moment you called me in this sanctuary to be your minister. I thank each and every one of you.

And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” Clothe and feed your neighbors. Yes, put a cloak on a chilly body and feed their empty stomachs. But also clothe your neighbor with God’s love and welcome and feed the hunger in people’s souls for more than just material pleasures. Help God transform and turn people’s lives around by loving every single person no matter who they are or where their faith and life’s journey has taken them. No one must go without God’s cloak and meal—not the lonely, not the aged or the young, not the straight or gay or transgender, not the poor, nor the rich, not the stranger who lacks citizenship documents, and not the descendants of the pilgrims, not the Mohican, the Massachuset, the Penna cook, the Wampanoags, not the sons and daughters of former slaves and slave owners, not Muslim, the Jew, the Baptists or the Episcopalians or the Catholics, nor those without any faith at all, and my friends not all those lost, poor, souls who claim to be Yankee fans. Clothe them in God’s love and feed them with the Word of God. (You may ask the Yankee fans to repent, though.)

Jesus told the crowd never to cheat their neighbors, or spread lies or malicious gossip about others, and be content with what money you have. In other words, treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated. All the rest is just commentary. Be honest, be kind, be compassionate, seek justice for the oppressed.

My friends, your loyalty, the best of yourselves, should always be given to God. Jesus of Nazareth asks us to go beyond minimums when it comes to loving our neighbors. How many times do you forgive each other, “seven times seven,” also known as infinite in measure.

Find meaning in being a Christian. But, please, know that neither you or me fully knows the mind of God. Be grounded in your expressions of faith but humble enough to know that God finds many paths to your neighbors as they find their path to the sacred. For you and me, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. But, please, never put God in such a small limited box that it’s somehow wrong for others who may trod a different path of faith. We should not limit the size God’s love.

Know that right here, right now, you are living in the eternity of God’s reign, God’s kingdom. You need not wait until you die to know that God has come as near to you and your own beating heart, your own conscience and the very soul of your being. We are living in just one phase of eternity and no need to worry about tomorrow.

*I don't know about tomorrow
I just live from day to day...
And I don't worry about the future
For I know what Jesus said
And today He walks beside me
For He knows what lies ahead. (Kelly Price)*

You are God’s beloved.

The winnowing fork of God’s love is not devoid of God’s love. We all have chaff in our lives that God can help us discard. In your most intimate moments with God, confess that which holds a grip upon you, that causes you and others pain. Ask God for forgiveness. God will. Then let go and let be. And if you fall, repeat your confession. We worship a God of no limits when it comes to mercy, forgiveness, and love.

Folks you and your neighbors are born in the image of God. Treat each other like it. The light of God is within us all. Nurture that flame by practicing your faith.

*And he walks with me
And he talks with me
And he tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.*

My beloved community, you know it. You have given joy to me.

What then shall we do? Be open to God’s nudges. Love your neighbor as you should love yourself. Amen.

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