



“Faith in Action”



A Sermon By
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August 2, 2015

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon is available at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2015-08-02-AAA.mp3>.

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15
Ephesians 4:1-6
Psalm 78:23-29
John 6:24-35

The Rev. Amanda A. Akes
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The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost
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May I speak to you in the name of God; who was, who is, and who is to come. Amen.

In our second reading today, we hear Paul beg the Christian community at Ephesus to lead a life worthy of the calling to which they have been called. What they have been called to, Paul goes on to explain, is maturation of faith and growth in Christ so that they may share in Christ's ministry and mission to build others up in love. This was the calling of the people who followed Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry. It remained Christianity's purpose when Paul penned his letter to the Christian community in Ephesus. And this focus on growing with and in Christ and sharing the love and hope we find in him with others is our calling as Christians today.

So how do we do that? How do we grow in faith and relationship with Jesus Christ? And how do we build others up in love? The answers are interrelated. When we build others up in love, we enter deeper into relationship with Jesus who was love incarnate. And vice versa, when we grow in faith and relationship with Jesus, we are compelled to build others up in love because Jesus himself did so and we wish to be more like him. Easy to say, right? But how do we actually accomplish it? How do we live out our call as Christians in our daily lives?

I'd like to share an example I recently experienced of what it looks like when Christians live into and live out the Christian calling. Two Sundays ago, members of the Grace Church Youth Group and their adult helpers were commissioned and prayed for at the 10:30 service. After the service, the group left for a six-day mission trip to CAMP JOY in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. CAMP JOY is an acronym that stands for Christian Appalachian Mission Project, Joining Other Youth. Our group joined about 90 other Youth from 6 Christian churches for a week of tent camping and community service, all in the name of Christ.

The actions of our Youth and their counterparts from other churches are an example of how to live out the Christian call of maturation in Christ and loving others in his name. The mission trip participants gave of themselves to help others. Each day, they made repairs or additions to the homes of individuals who are low income, elderly, or disabled and in need of assistance. Additionally, they sacrificed physical comfort, trading their comfy beds and air-conditioned homes for pop-up tents and battery-operated fans in the July heat!

Our group worked on three different worksites. The first worksite was the home of a man named Tony. Tony worked for a diesel distributor but injured his leg on the job. He was in a lot of pain

and needed a set of stairs built at the back entrance to his home and a small deck on front. These changes would allow Tony easier access to his home, alleviating his pain and reducing his risk of further injury. Our second worksite was Jessica's home. Jessica lives on the same street as Tony. She and her husband are visually impaired. Last year, one of the groups from CAMP JOY added a staircase to the back of Jessica's home. This year, we waterproofed and stained the staircase. At our third worksite, we painted the shed and deck of an 84 year-old widow named Vivian who made us iced tea and lemonade.

Tony, Jessica, and Vivian were each grateful for our assistance, but the gratitude wasn't one way. We were grateful for the opportunity to help. And our group had a blast, accomplishing each task that was set before us with pride. We grew cohesively as a group, laughing and singing and learning about one another as well as the practicalities of making a staircase level and mixing paint. We heard stories about the way God was at work in Tony, Jessica, and Vivian's lives. In our free time, we explored Cacapon State Park, the C&O Canal, and the old town feel of Berkeley Springs. Our group even led evening vespers one night, planning and leading music and a reflection. Throughout the week we glimpsed the love of God in one another, in the people we met, and in the beauty of creation that surrounded us.

I was privileged to witness the integrity, compassion, and curiosity of our mission trip participants. They approached their work with dedication and focus. They treated other mission trip participants, leaders, and community members with respect and dignity. They engaged their individual spiritual journeys with authenticity. And they gave of their time and summer vacation to participate. They made the choice to seek to grow in faith and relationship with Jesus Christ while building others up in love. They are an example to me of faith in action.

Faith in action is what Paul begged the Christian community in Ephesus to engage in. It is the kind of life that we are called to as followers of Christ. Putting our faith into action means growing in the love of Christ, and then bringing that love which we know and feel, into our hurting and broken world. It means sharing joy with those who feel trapped. It means going out of our way to be compassionate. It's getting outside of our comfort zone and being surprised by God's grace.

I've sung the praises of our youth today and lauded their mission trip experience, because it's important to share their good work with the wider Grace community - you who have prayed for them and supported them as they embarked upon their mission trip. And because I think they are an inspiring example.

That being said, not all of us can go away for a week of mission work. But, all of us are called to put our faith into action. We can do that right here, right now. And in fact, that is exactly what we should be doing. Paul knew this and encouraged the Christian community in Ephesus to get to work. We are called upon to do likewise in our day and age. Teresa of Avila, a 16th century Christian mystic wrote:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

May Jesus Christ, our true bread from heaven, strengthen you to grow in relationship with him
and live a life that reflects his love now and always. Amen.