

June 26, 2011

Matthew 25: 31-46, Serving Christ by Serving Others

Today I feel like a little kid on Christmas morning---so many gifts are given to me that I don't know which one I like best! How can I choose? The new sign on the front of the church is something I have dreamed of for almost two years!

Sending blankets to help the Good Samaritan Group minister to people in Vietnam was an opportunity that fell into my lap! It's a way to serve people I will probably never meet and never expected to be able to help in such a tangible way.

And then there's Team Mississippi! I was overwhelmed by grace last year to find that other people wanted to go with me to help the people in Mississippi who lost so much to Hurricane Katrina, and this year they are the ones taking me. It is their desire, their dream this year that is leading us to Mississippi for the second time.

Their hard work on fund- raising and their willingness to make such a financial sacrifice has brought us to today when we are about to commission the team to do the work of God, representing all of us here at Linda Vista UMC as the body of Christ in the world.

The convergence of these gifts has brought me to my knees this week in gratitude and humility.

Christ taught us that anyone who gives a cup of cold water to the thirsty, who feeds the hungry and clothes the naked, who visits the sick and the imprisoned----anyone who does these things is serving him.

And he tells us that this is what we will be judged on---that whether or not we do these things is what is important.

He isn't counting how many people we convert to Christianity. He isn't keeping track of how many times we make mistakes or do bad things.

He wants us to serve him by serving others.

Because it's all very well to sing pretty hymns, to talk about how much we love God, to repeat the words of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed, but it's entirely different to LIVE OUT what we say we believe!

It's an entirely different way of living when we FOLLOW CHRIST and not just say how much we love him!

Jesus says that we will be judged by our actions, not just by our words. Not just by what is in our hearts, but what we do with our hands.

It's what we spend our time doing and not what our intentions are that matter to God.

What are our hands doing? Where are our feet going? What difference are we making in the world?

And I can tell you this morning that we, the people of Linda Vista United Methodist Church are using our hands, our feet, our resources and our time, very well right now.

The fruits of our labors are very evident this morning, and so this is a very joyful day! It's filled with manifestations of the abundant life we find in Christ.

We are the Body of Christ in action--- God's love and hope and grace incarnate.

This day is truly an answer to prayer, the prayer that this church would move forward, the prayer that Christ would lead us to work for the transformation of the world.

I believe in the deepest part of my heart that missions are what we, as a church, need to be doing. Missions are God's vision for us, and we are beginning to live more fully into that vision.

Today we are celebrating our increased mission to the community, which begins with better identification within the community by having a more easily-seen church sign. We have already increased our support of Bayside Community Center, and I can hardly wait for God to show us what's next for us in this area!

We are also celebrating our support of the Good Samaritan Medical and Dental mission team, which serves people in Vietnam who otherwise have no access to medical and dental care.

We have given from our financial resources for a number of years, and this year we are increasing our support by giving of our time and talents to make prayer blankets to give to the patients.

We are increasing our mission and sending our prayers and love where we cannot go in person, to the other side of the world.

And we celebrate our mission to the other side of this country, to Mississippi, where people are still waiting to get back into safe, secure, and clean homes nearly 6 years after Katrina left them so devastated!

I, for one, will never forget Mr. McKee, who we helped last year, and how he went down on his knees and cried to have walls again, and when his son said, "I didn't know there were still people like you in this world."

Even if we don't hear words like those again on this trip, we will be making a difference in the world, one family at a time.

And one prayer blanket at a time.

And one person in our community at a time.

Bringing a cup of cold water to the thirsty, food to the hungry, visiting the sick,

Bringing homes to the homeless and hope to the hopeless.

In September, representatives from Habitat for Humanity will be coming to this church to conduct an orientation session. Thanks to our new sign, they won't have any trouble knowing who we are!

And we will begin another adventure to be in mission to our broader San Diego community, one that will require our time and our labor. I hope that many of you will join our Habitat team!

Join our team to make a difference in the world.

If you can't swing a hammer, there are other ways to volunteer for Habitat. You can learn about them at the orientation, so I want everyone to attend!

And there are other places to volunteer besides Habitat. There is a service opportunity for everyone, even those of you who can't get around much. Because prayer is powerful and effective, and I know you can all do that!

Together we are growing as disciples and finding ways to transform the world!

It's an exciting time here at Linda Vista UMC! Just the other day one of you said to me, "Things are getting very busy at the church!"

This is a good thing! A VERY good thing! So get ready! The best is yet to come!

And all God's people said, AMEN!!