

“Believing Right and Doing Good”

A few weeks ago after the 11:00 service, I was talking with a member of our congregation. We were chatting, as we normally do, about this and that and I made a comment to him that I was unusually hungry. Of course, I'm always hungry after Sunday services but this particular day, I was *really* hungry. In fact, I told him that what would really be good, was if I had a big plate of buffalo wings like the ones we both liked from a local restaurant right up the street. That was just a random comment in our brief conversation. No big deal right? I said I was hungry and that wings sounded good. I thought nothing of it. I finished up my duties here at the church and went home. Now normally when I get home, my family is there and we eat lunch together, but this particular Sunday, it was just me and one of our kids. Now remember, I was *really* hungry. I quickly changed clothes, rushed into the kitchen and starting searching through the fridge and freezer for something that would be really satisfying. And just when I decided on a pizza, I got a text from the church member I was talking to earlier. The text said, “check your front porch.” I walked outside and lo and behold sitting on my porch was a “to go” box from that restaurant up the street filled with those chicken wings I love so much. I was one happy man. But it wasn't just the food that made so happy; it was the thought that meant so much. This person went out of his way and simply did something nice for me. I have to tell you, it really made my day!

I share this story with you today because as Christians we are called to a way of life that is to be selfless and giving. We are called to care for one another, which includes doing things for one another. Now delivering an order of chicken wings to someone might not be the first thing we equate with Christian selflessness but let me tell you, for me that day, it was probably one of the best examples. Why? Because it was an intentional act of doing good and doing good for each other is what we're supposed to be about. John makes this very clear in our epistle reading today.

Beginning with verse 16 John writes, “For this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

Again, I know it might seem a little dramatic to equate a person taking some chicken wings to a neighbor as a response to Jesus laying down his life for our salvation but even the smallest things we do for each other are all part of the package. Because when we take a step back and think about our Christian faith, it is first about believing that our Lord Jesus Christ lived a selfless life all the way to death on a cross for you and me so that we might have forgiveness and be at peace with God. It means, through the gift of faith, truly believing **that first** and then living a life of response that includes doing good. Of course, what “good” looks like is different for all of us on any given day, but it should be a vital part of our daily Christian lives because it’s what we are called to do. So let me ask you, is it evident in your life? Can you remember a time yesterday that you did something good for someone with absolutely no expectation of anything in return? If not yesterday, can you remember a time last week? Last year?

While you think about that, let me tell you about another one of our own at Hope who comes to my mind when I think of doing good as a response to what Christ did for us.

This man’s wife actually shared this story with me a few days ago and she gave me permission to share it with you. You see, her father, not that long ago, was very ill. When things got really bad he was moved to a special facility where he could be constantly cared for. It was hard to watch, as any of us who have experienced the declining health of a parent or loved one knows. During her father’s time in this place, she found something out that was truly remarkable about her father and her husband. But she didn’t find this out until after her father had died. What she found out was that on many days after work, her husband before coming home, would visit her dying father. And he didn’t just show up and talk for a few minutes; he showed up with a laptop computer and soft pretzels. You see, her father had a grandson who played minor league baseball and her husband would sit with him and watch the highlights of the grandson’s games on that lap-top while eating soft pretzels. What a powerful witness of Christ’s love. This husband, on his own, with no expectation of anything in return, spent intentional time with his father in law, experiencing a little joy a with him before he passed away.

I take you back to 1 John 3 verse 16, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for others.” My fellow brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, **we know love**. Even though we might not feel like we do at times; even though some of our lives are so messed up at the moment; even though our loved ones might be in their final days, **we know love**. And on this fourth Sunday of Easter, that love should still be fresh in our minds because it’s the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and died for us. The perfect and innocent Christ took all of our sins upon

himself to the point of losing his life **for us**. But then on Easter morning he walked out of the tomb alive and well. That is our hope and promise also! One day Christ will return and we too will walk with him in the new creation forever. But until that day, he calls us to live in response to that eternal promise. I admit that this is hard to do. We are just not wired to serve others as much as we are wired to serve ourselves. But this is our call as Christians.

That's why having the proper understanding of how this whole thing works is so important. We talk about it all of the time but I don't think we can say it enough. By God's grace, we are saved through our faith in what he did for us in Jesus Christ. He needs nothing from us. But people, no matter who they are or where they are, need so much from us. But we have to be willing to open our hearts and actually do something instead of being so self-absorbed. Again, we go back to John because he is so clear about this.

In verse 17, he writes, "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

A huge part of our life of response is doing good by serving our neighbors with the "goods" or the gifts that we might have but that they might not have. Yes, material things are a part of this but it's more than that. I know a few of you, for example, who have expertise in a certain areas of life or certain talents that others don't have. I know those of you who have life experiences that can really help people who are going through the same types of things. Share these "gifts" you have been given. Keep your eyes and ears open as you interact with folks at home, at work, and around town as to where you might be able to offer something you have. This isn't easy, it takes effort because you actually have to listen to what people are saying. You have to actually be observant and aware of particular situations you find yourself in and most importantly, you have to be willing to act! But isn't making someone's life a little better with what can sometimes be the smallest good deed worth a little of your time and effort? John certainly reminds us of this in verse 18. "Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth," he writes. This is so important for all of us.

Take time to care about other people's lives and do some good. Whether it's chicken wings or watching baseball with a sick relative. Whether it's volunteering your time leading a group of kids at vacation Bible school because you have the time or helping a neighbor landscape his yard because you have those skills and he doesn't- whatever it is take time to actually act on the opportunities you are given. No matter how big or

small, the truth is that our doing good is really about showing others what the love God showed us in Jesus Christ actually means in our lives. As I said earlier, it's all part of the package of being a Christian. Let's all try our best to seize those opportunities where we might just make someone's day!

In closing this morning, I leave you with this thought. Most of us know John 3:16, right? It's the verse most Christians can quote. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." It's the essence of our faith. To quote the first two words of the sermon title, having faith in this truth is believing right. I encourage you to add 1 John 3:16 as another verse you can quote just as freely from memory. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for others." Why? Because having faith in this truth reminds us of the importance of believing right *and* doing good. May we all use our lives to bless others in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**