

Be the Church Luke 16:10-13 1 Timothy 2:1-3

There is a famous series of quotes which give us possible answers to the question, "what does it mean to be human?" It reveals a tension between those who say "it is who we are - our being which determines what we do." and those who say "what we do - the actions we take in life - form who we are. Aristotle is quoted first: "To be is to do." which locates the start point in our being, our essence, which then determines what we do. "To do is to be." answers Jean-Paul Sartre, suggesting that it is what we do which forms us; our actions come first and actually create our being. But a very unexpected person actually solved this very difficult existential problem. Frank Sinatra who said, "Do be do be do..."

Silliness aside, I do think Sinatra gets it right. Much like the irresolvable debate in the New Testament between "faith and works," who we are and what we do need are inextricably linked. And we need to reflect on both, wrestling with them so we know we are serving the right "boss" in our life. Who are we as individuals? What constitutes our being - we are God's children, made in God's image to reflect creativity and love and grace. And who are we to be together? the Church, the Beloved Community of God's children. And together we are more than just the sum of our individuality. So if we are God's children and God's community of love on earth, what then should we be doing?

Our reading from 1st Timothy reveals one central task, and that is pray. We need to pray for one another, pray for our leaders and live in contemplation, remembering who we are and who God is. I will confess I do not pray or meditate enough and I need to change that. And one of the reasons I must pray leads us to a way we are to be. As individuals we are to be constantly transformed by God, renewed, recreated and unless we open ourselves to God in prayer and make room in our life to talk to and listen for God, we will not be very malleable clay in God's hands. Prayer for the individual is not primarily asking for what we want as it is aligning ourselves with God and remembering who we are.

And prayer is the foundation for who we are to be as the community of faith. We believe our prayers can change things and people (including us). Prayer is also the foundation of another task we are to do. Prayer gives us the strength we need to take action. As God's beloved community on earth we are here to be agents of change, of transformation in the world.

As we follow Jesus in the Gospels we see him changing individual lives and also calling the leaders and the nation to greater justice, love and peace in God's name. We are to be changed as individuals when we come to church, but it does not stop there. We then go out from this place to change the world. Our church job is not done at 11:30 am on Sunday it is just beginning again in a new week of being transformers in God's world.

Being willing to be transformed and being an agent of transformation in the world both require something from us: sacrifice. If we are to be transformed we must be willing to give up the old us and sometimes the comfortable habits we have cultivated in our life. As the wisdom of Sesame Street teaches us, "you've got to put down the ducky if you want to play the saxophone." We cannot cling mightily to the past and expect to move fully into the now - the place where God can transform us. We must give up the old ways.

Likewise we must be willing to sacrifice our time and energy and sometimes old attitudes as we seek to be change agents in the world. Jesus models for us the transformative power of sacrifice. His work also shows us that the results are not immediate or even what we expect sometimes. Nor will encouraging our neighbors on the path of transformation make us popular. Our job as the beloved community of God is to call for greater love and peace in this world and sometimes that will put us at odds with powers and principalities and attitudes that belong to the world around us. This being the church is not always easy.

Another essential task of being the church is one that empowers us as individuals and combines us into a powerful force for good, and that task is connection. Through prayer we connect to God, individually and as a group together. And this is the goal of our worship and our study: to bring us closer and closer connection to the one who loves and transforms us.

Church is a place to connect to other pilgrims on the journey of faith. Here we share our stories, learn from one another and strengthen one another. Here, too, we seek to encounter the "other" those different from us and so we study other religions and tackle heterosexism and racism. Such connection is important in the task of personal and corporate transformation.

The church is also a place to stay connected to ourselves. As the Melody Choir practiced our song this week, I was reminded of the churches of my youth. I still remember them, what they looked like, the people there. I still remember powerful connections with God and though

my views of God have changed radically over the years, there remains a powerful sense of a lifetime of connection to God and the Church - The church is a touchstone for us no matter where we live or what we do. God's love follows us all the way.

Finally the church is to be a place of celebration and comfort. We celebrate the gifts of this life. We celebrate God's amazing creativity in the beauty and diversity of the world and in people. We celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and like last week in worship we also remember together the losses we have faced so that we can comfort one another and all those who grieve. We celebrate and we comfort one other as two sides of the same coin. For if life was not so wonderful and love not so deep, then we would not need comfort in our losses. But because we celebrate and acknowledge the wonder and joy of life, so we comfort each other when the pain comes.

How are we to Be the church? By praying, by being transformed and being agents of transformation. By sacrificing and connecting with God, others and even ourselves. By celebrating and comforting one another. Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, has recently put out a new banner that call us the "Be the Church." Next week, we will have that Be the Church banner which goes on to say "Protect the environment. Care for the Poor. Forgive often. Reject racism. Fight for the powerless. Share earthly and spiritual resources. Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life."

How do we at Faith United Church of Christ Be the Church in the world? Are we doing the right things? Are we missing some key tasks? This is the question we must always ask ourselves. And God's grace allows us to ask honestly knowing God will guide and direct us on the path of continuous transformation if we are willing. AMEN

Luke 16:10-13 The Message (MSG)

God Sees Behind Appearances

¹⁰⁻¹³ Jesus went on to make these comments:

If you're honest in small things,
you'll be honest in big things;

If you're a crook in small things,
you'll be a crook in big things.

If you're not honest in small jobs,
who will put you in charge of the store?

No worker can serve two bosses:

He'll either hate the first and love the second

Or adore the first and despise the second.

You can't serve both God and the Bank.

Simple Faith and Plain Truth

1 Timothy 2: ¹⁻³The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.

BE THE CHURCH

Protect the environment. Care for the poor.

Forgive often. Reject racism.

Fight for the powerless.

Share earthly and spiritual resources.

Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life.