

October 4, 2020
The Walk: Week 3

An Opportunity to Serve
Rev. Meredith Kemp-Pappan

In our Sunday School classes and in worship, we have been on a “Walk,” using Rev. Adam Hamilton’s book, “The Walk,” to re-introduce us to five spiritual practices. The first week, we explored the importance of regular worship attendance. Whether you are worshipping online or in-person, worship is an opportunity to give thanks to God and to reflect that gratitude in our daily lives. Last week, we re-visited the importance of daily study of scripture. Reading the Bible, even a little each day, orients us towards the will of God.

This week, we learn that SERVICE is directly connected to WORSHIP and STUDY. Worship of God and study of the sacred text are essential for faithful Christian living. SERVICE is what WORSHIP and STUDY look like in action. Even a passing glance at scripture reveals that God is deeply concerned for the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. What’s more--God often has harsh words for churches who may worship with the “right” liturgy, song, and pageantry, but who neglect to pursue justice. Without SERVICE, a congregation is nothing more than a country club. Rev. Adam Hamilton reflects, “I’ve known Christians who seemed to believe that all that God wanted from them was to go to church, to pray, to read their Bibles, and to refrain from doing evil. But throughout Scripture we find that God calls us to do good, to practice justice, kindness, and love. When we fail to do these things, our worship and other acts of devotion are worthless to God.”¹

But I also know that congregations can often feel daunted by the call to service others. Where to even begin? One question that can help discerning how and where to serve is by asking the question: *what are the situations that break God’s heart?* When God sees pain and brokenness, poverty and injustice in our world, [God] is moved with compassion. And God is so moved with compassion that God cries out, cries out, as God did to Isaiah so long ago, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?” And with Isaiah I believe each of us is meant to respond, “I’m here; send me” (Isaiah 6:8).”

When I was a new pastor, I used to believe that my job was to think of ways my small congregation could get involved with our community. I very quickly learned that I didn’t have to go looking for opportunities--opportunities would find us. Opportunities to serve literally knocked on our church door. And so, during my time there, we opened our building to 4 weekly AA groups. People would knock on our door, asking for bus vouchers or food items, so we started a small food pantry in a spare classroom. In addition to non-perishable foods, we eventually added a modest stockpile of diapers, socks, and men’s work shoes. We do not have to look very hard to see where the Spirit is calling us to serve, although that same Spirit often upends our priorities and preconceived notions. I resonate with Rev. Adam Hamilton who writes, “Most often the opportunities to serve and show kindness are unplanned—they are interruptions. Part of what is necessary to serve Christ by serving others is our willingness to be interrupted.”²

¹ Hamilton, Adam. The Walk (p. 68). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

² Hamilton, Adam. The Walk (pp. 80-81). Abingdon Press.

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I think back to my early ministry days, and there were plenty of mission opportunities that were planned and prepped--vacation Bible school and neighborhood outreach events. But the ones I hold most dear are the ones that seemed to fall in our lap, but I now, know, were sent unannounced by the Holy Spirit. What we think of an interruption--a knock on the door, an email, or a phone call--is often the Spirit inbreaking into our routine to call attention to need or situation. "Whom should I send?"

Injustice is largely a systemic problem, meaning that complicated social problems, like racism and poverty, have an intricate and fibrous root system. So doing justice, especially in a small way (like offering a warm meal or even a bus pass) contributes to ultimately uprooting of injustice. It is especially important for congregations to cross ideological and denominational lines in order to pursue justice together. I'm proud that Trinity serves with dozens of other churches with our work with Topeka JUMP, DOORSTEP, Harvesters, and the Topeka Rescue Mission (just to name a few). There is a lot of negative attitudes about organized religion, but organized religion is especially suited to organizing people and answering the call to serve our neighbors in need.

Doing justice, loving kindness, practicing love—these are intertwined. Doing justice entails practicing kindness. Practicing kindness is an expression of love and justice.³ There is a saying in the Talmud: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." If you are reading *The Walk* for Sunday School or as part of your personal enrichment, each section ends with a personal challenge. This week, Rev. Hamilton challenges us to engage in daily acts of kindness. I want you to go even further: I challenge you to engage in a daily act of justice. Justice takes many forms. Maybe you have signed up to help with our food distribution this Wednesday. Maybe you are planning to phone a friend who has been lonely. Maybe you are writing letters to elected officials. Maybe your opportunity has yet to knock, but your eyes and ears are open, waiting for the Spirit to ask: "whom shall I send?" What will you answer be?

³ Hamilton, Adam. *The Walk* (p. 74). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.