

## **Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV**

### **Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: November 12, 2023, Year A, 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost **Stewardship 1 of 2**

Text: Amos 5:18-24

Title: Worship and Work in the World

Focus: The text from Amos calls us to check to see if our worship and actions in the world match up with each other. Are we seeking justice in the world as well as honoring God with our worship? Do our worship and our work in the world cohere with each other?

**Stewardship Week 1 of 2:** The stewardship focus of the sermon is “How do you know if an act of kindness makes a difference?”

Two responses:

- We invite you to be a part of something bigger than yourself in the ministry and mission of Good Shepherd.
- Week after week, we will be telling “Stories of Generosity: Good News at Good Shepherd” to show how together we are making a difference.

### **First Reading: Amos 5:18-24**

<sup>18</sup>Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; <sup>19</sup>as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. <sup>20</sup>Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

<sup>21</sup>I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. <sup>22</sup>Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. <sup>23</sup>Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. <sup>24</sup>But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

### **A Stewardship Question: How Do We Spent our Time, Energy, and Dollars?**

**How do you know if an act of kindness or expression of love will make a difference? Is something worth your time and effort? Or is it worth investing your dollars?**

Isn't that a question that we ask ourselves all day, every day, as we choose how to spend our time, where to direct our attention, and as we set aside money for the things that are important to us, knowing that we could choose to spend that money in other ways.

**Here's an example of what I mean:** I begin each day with a “Morning Walk” with our dogs and my wife. It's a way to orient me to the day, to think about what I wish to accomplish or the priorities I have set. It's a prayer-like focus time that helps me

determine how I will spend my time. Then there of course unexpected things. On Tuesday of this week, I received a phone call in which a person essentially said, “This is our need. Are you able to help with that?”

**That’s the key question, right there, isn’t it?** In the story I told, this was posed to me, but that same scenario pops up every day for all of us. There is the expected and the unexpected and then you have the opportunity to decide how you will spend your time.

- We are given the gifts of time, energy, attention, dollars, and other resources.
- How will we use them wisely?
- How will we make those decisions?

This example is from my experience as a pastor, but we all face decisions as we determine how shall we spent our time, energy, and dollars. How do you adapt if that unexpected thing comes?

## **Samantha Comes to Worship at Good Shepherd**

If you’re a regular worshiper at Good Shepherd, you know that each week after we have announcements, I welcome people and I invite any who wish to stand up to introduce themselves to do so. I often say something like, “If you’re here for the first time or first time in a while and would like to introduce yourself or be introduced. . .”

As I look around the congregation any particular Sunday, sometimes I see people I don’t happen to recognize. Sometimes I think I know who everyone is. Even if I don’t recognize everyone, I have no particular expectation for what will happen after that invitation to stand.

On Sunday, October 8 at 9 a.m., a person whom I did not recognize stood up right away to introduce themselves. She introduced herself as Samantha, who learned about Good Shepherd from participating in the programs at the Eddy House, where we take dinner every week.

## **The Message of Amos**

The text from Amos calls us to check to see if our worship and actions in the world match up with each other. Are we seeking justice in the world as well as honoring God with our worship?

- “I hate, I despise your festivals. I take no delight in your solemn assemblies: (Amos 5:21).

These are such stark and harsh words. What was going on that the prophet would deliver this message?

**Context:** The prophet Amos spoke to the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the height of its power. The kingdom was expanding and rich, with all signs pointing to success and blessing. There was one problem: that success was accompanied by idolatry and injustice. Earlier in chapter five, Amos specifically calls it out:

- They “trample on the poor” (5:11)
- Take for themselves what is intended to be shared by all (5:11)
- Take bribes (5:12)
- And push aside the needy (5:12)

Their religious practices were not matched by living with justice and fairness, particularly as they related to those on the outside (the marginalized) and the poor.

## **The Coherence Between Worship and Actions in the World**

Let’s move back to our setting from that of Amos.

- **How does this welcome to Samantha and any particular newcomer make a difference? How is it a sign of the love of God?**

First of all, the message delivered by Amos: “I hate, I despise your festivals and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies . . .” suggests that a Statement of Welcome, such as Good Shepherd has, means nothing if it is not authentic. If it is words on a piece of paper or a show done only in worship and not lived out, then it is a bunch of noise, says Amos in v. 23.

The courage of any newcomer to stand up and introduce themselves is astounding to me in and of itself. I am aware that every time in worship when I invite people to stand up, that it is an *invitation* and that to say “Yes” to such an invitation surely feels like taking a risk. I don’t wish to cause any discomfort by creating a scenario that feels like obligation or social expectation. I truly want it to be an invitation.

It is hard to come to a new place. It is hard to come to a church for the first time. I’m sure people wonder things like

- What will it be like?
- Will I know any of the songs?
- Will I fit in? Will any of it feel familiar?

So, I have respect for anyone who stands up to introduce themselves.

### **About Samantha:**

- As a young adult, she surely noticed most here are older than her parents.

- As a transitioning, transgender person, there must be self-consciousness about one's identity and how one is perceived by others or some anxiety about how others may respond. *Any* newcomer might feel that anxiety, and especially a young adult sorting through questions of identity.

### **What did she say that day?**

"I attend the Eddy House," for whom, of course, Good Shepherd folks prepare a meal every Monday.

I think there was a murmur of delight among us when we heard that—that Samantha knew of Good Shepherd through the Eddy House.

That opening question: **How do you know if an act of kindness or expression of love will make a difference?**

What I called the "murmur of delight" spontaneously occurred because we saw an indication that preparing a weekly meal to be served at the Eddy House in what we intend to be a sign of God's love appeared to have made a difference to Samantha.

Without presuming or suggesting anything about Samantha in particular, here's what else this sort of act of kindness as a sign of God's love can mean to a young person who is LGBTQ or who finds they don't fit traditional categories of sexual identity:

### **Social Stigma and Impact on Mental Health and Suicide Frequency**

- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among young people aged 10-24 (Hedegard, Curtin, and Warner, 2018) – and LGBTQ+ youth are at significantly increased risk.
- LGBTQ youth are **more than 4 X as likely** to attempt suicide than their [age] peers. (Johns, et. al., 2019, Johns, et. al., 2020).
- Facts about LGBTQ Youth Suicide: "LGBTQ youth are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society."<sup>1</sup>

### **What Makes a Difference? What does research suggest?**

- Having **at least one accepting adult** can reduce the risk of a suicide attempt among LGBTQ young people by 40%.

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ Mental Health Resources: Facts about LGBTQ Youth Suicide, The Trevor Project. Other data presented here is from the same report. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/>

## **It's a Stewardship Question. . .**

As the opening engager for the sermon, I posed a question or scenario:

- **How do you know if an act of kindness or expression of love will make a difference?**
- **Is something worth your time and effort? Or is it worth investing your dollars?**

I told the story of Samantha, who courageously stood up to introduce herself to others. I described how the connection to Good Shepherd was made through Samantha participating in the Eddy House and eating meals prepared by Good Shepherd folks.

### **Samantha later told me about another connection to Good Shepherd.**

She told me that two years ago, she received a quilt that was crafted by a person from Good Shepherd.

- She was facing a medical crisis and received this quilt from people she didn't even know. That made an impression on her.
- She told me that she still has it.
- To receive a personal, handmade gift like that from people who didn't even know her—that is an impression that has stuck with her for 2 years.
- By the way, I want to explain that Samantha told me it's "totally fine" with her for me to tell her story.

### **How do you know if an act of kindness or expression of love will make a difference?**

- A quilt made 2 years ago made a difference to Samantha.
- Meals prepared for the Eddy House made a difference.

This question about "How do you know if it made a difference?" and the related questions about time, effort, and dollars are ultimately stewardship questions (or generosity or faith questions)

## **How Do We Spent our Time, Energy, and Dollars?**

*Transition to talking here about Good Shepherd as a community of faith which does seek to make a difference, does seek to have worship and work in the world cohere.*

For Good Shepherd to collectively have that ability to seek to have an impact in the world as a sign of God's love, we need everybody to participate in that.

Just as I say in worship that a sense of welcome is created by all people and not just the pastor or designated leaders alone, seeking to create this kind of difference requires all of us.

**This coming week:** You'll receive a mailing from the church with more information about our financial plan for 2024 and how you can be a part of that.

- We have set a goal to have 10 individuals or households who have not previously prepared an Estimate of Giving to do so for the first time this year.
- We need increased giving from others to meet an offering goal of \$540,321.
- This is an increase over actual giving over the previous 12 months of 9.5%
- If you and your household have prepared an estimate of giving and/or been regular givers in the past, thank you. As you talk with your family and pray about your giving to the church this coming year, if your circumstance allows, please join me making an increased estimate or gift for 2024.
- We will invite you to bring Estimate of Giving Cards to worship on November 26, the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

## **Making an Impact**

**How do you know if an act of kindness or expression of love will make a difference? Is something worth your time and effort? Or is it worth investing your dollars?**

That's the question/scenario I posed at the beginning of the sermon.

Sometimes you may know right away.

Sometimes you have delightful surprises, like Samantha describing how she received this quilt two years ago that has made a difference.

Sometimes, you don't know for sure what the impact is or will be, and that's an intentional act of faith or trust, too. You seek to respond to God's call and trust that you have made the best decision even when you can't be assured of a particular outcome.

In the coming weeks, we will be telling "Stories of Generosity: Good News at Good Shepherd" to show what kind of impact we are having at Good Shepherd.

In the ministry and mission of Good Shepherd, thanks be to God for the opportunity to be a part of something greater than ourselves. That is a part of what we're inviting you to at Good Shepherd.

**Next Week in worship:** I want to tell you more about Good News at Good Shepherd.