



Serving in Retirement

BY BECKI ESSELMAN

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Retirement — this word conjures up many images. Some think of peaceful scenes, times of ease, and

fun activities, while others need to ponder many questions. Several years before I retired, I prayed, asking what God wanted me to do. I could not hear a clear answer, so, after 40 years of teaching, I took the plunge and retired. Then I had to figure out how I was supposed to use my time to serve God. I just kept reminding myself: *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will act* (Psalm 37:5).

Since I love working with children, I volunteered at a Lutheran school and taught Vacation Bible School. I helped make quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Not knowing if these were my plans or God's plans, I returned to the Word: *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope* (Jeremiah 29:11). I kept plugging away until I made the decision to move to another state so I could reside and grow closer to my son and his family.

Regardless of my circumstances, my earnest desire has always been to serve the Lord. It took several months to get settled in my new home, and then COVID-19 struck. Forced to stay home, I studied my Bible and prayed. I struggled to find joy and fought the feeling of uselessness coming over me. Once again, I turned to His Word — this time returning to my confirmation verse, *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go* (Joshua 1:9). Previously, I went to this verse for

courage; now I needed these words to help me find joy! God commands me to not be dismayed, and I needed to learn to trust Him more. *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore* (Psalm 16:11).

I have always had trouble with waiting. Pandemic isolation only amplified these feelings. Again, I turned to the Word. I read, *But for you, O Lord, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer* (Psalm 38:15). But my struggle remained. I wanted to serve — to do something for God. I wasn't comfortable with just sitting and waiting.

That's when I read a *Mustard Seed Devotion* taken from Psalm 23 which spoke about looking for the green pastures. I then realized I could look for my own green pastures! God gently reminds me that I can serve Him in big and small ways, even if I'm stuck at home! I began contacting friends to see how they were doing. I sent notes. I sewed masks. I told neighbors, store clerks, any person I met about God's love. Whether working or retired, my true vocation has always been, and continues to be, serving God, praising Him, and finding ways to serve.

Please pray with me: *May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope* (Romans 15:13). May we always remember that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. May we all have that joy and hope that He desires for us. Amen! **Q**

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