

“What Then Should We Do?”

Luke 3:1-17

1 Peter 4:7-11

Having prophesied to the people “Prepare the way” for the messiah, the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, for he is coming, John is asked by the people (the crowds, tax collectors, and the soldiers) “What then should we do?” What was John’s response? To each it was specific: to the crowds, preparing the way and bearing fruit looked like giving a coat and sharing food when there was enough, and another had none; to the tax collectors, preparing the way and bearing fruit was being honest in the amount they collected; and to the soldiers, preparing the way and bearing fruit was being true and fair and appreciative.

I don’t think any of us would argue that these are all things that are good and right to do. Well, just like the crowds and the tax collectors and the soldiers, our journey of preparing the way and fulfilling our call as the church, the body of Christ, involves a series of things we should be doing. We can start with what has already been mentioned and then to find out more, we can look closer at Peter’s letter.

### **1 Peter 4:7-11**

**The end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.**

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

What then should we do?

First of all, let’s make no mistake on who “we” is. In both Luke’s gospel and Peter’s message here, “we” is a charge to us all. Whether we identify with someone in the crowd, a tax collector, a soldier, an elected leader in the church, or a dedicated and faithful member of the community of believers, the “we” is us. As we were reminded and celebrated through Advent, we were all called to “prepare the way of the Lord”; for the coming light of Christ. With Christ here now, we are directed and called to bear fruit in our lives according to God’s righteousness. “Wow”, what an awesome responsibility “we” have.

So, now that we know we are all being charged to prepare the way and bear fruit according to God’s righteousness, what is it then we should be doing?

Peter suggests four main things and they can all be considered major elements of what William Barclay calls “Living by the Will of God.”

The first is to pray. We are each called to live a disciplined life of prayer, exercising our faculties of mind, heart, will, and soul. In prayer, we faithfully acknowledge the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and help us through all of life’s twists and turns. In our prayer, we must remember to pray without ceasing. Prayer is not just a tool to use during crisis. Prayer is a faithful and trusting conversation with God and we must all remember that our line to God is always open. Before Jesus did anything, healing a man born blind, feeding the 5000, or sharing a loaf of bread, he prayed.

The second is mutual love. The more we learn about love, especially God’s steadfast and enduring love, the more we come to realize that love is strenuous and intense at times. In our Christian love for one another, we learn that the opposite of that love is not hate, but indifference. Mutual love is able to endure. One commentator shares:

“Life and work in the Christian mission require that people look away from their own rights and concerns, that they not be too easily offended by the (foibles) of their fellow Christians, lest the mission to which the church is called be neglected. Not every emotional and psychic bruise can be given attention; otherwise all the church’s energy for mission and witness would be burned up in damage control.” (Craddock 1995). For Peter, it was imperative for all members of the community to participate in establishing a community of mutual love, support, and service to each other. It is imperative because it will be the love and support of others that helps the community survive against threats and suffering.

The third is hospitality. True hospitality is ungrudgingly and without complaining the “love of strangers.” Hospitality is the ability and willingness to be both a host and a guest at the same time; the recognition that we all encounter a time in which we need to be willing to care for others as well as a time in which we need to be cared for. The first apostle’s and members of the early church in their travels depended on the hospitality of others. It is presumed likely the early church wouldn’t have survived without hospitality. I am not sure the church today will survive without a culture of hospitality.

The fourth is gifts. The term used here for gifts is “*charisma*.” Not an outward attractiveness or personality type as we often think of in terms of a “charismatic” person, but more specifically that each person has a gift, making each a charismatic; meaning each has been equipped to serve. Not that this really matters but I almost titled today’s sermon “Embracing *Charisma*”, mostly because I think this is one of the most important practical things we should be acknowledging.

The term “*charisma*” is unique to Paul’s writings, and again is referring to the gifts each person has been given by God to emphasize their purpose in strengthening the Christian community. “Every Christian has received a gift, there is a variety of gifts, and the gifts are not for individual self-aggrandizement but for edification of the Christian community as a whole.” We encountered this first in 1 Corinthians 12 and then again in Romans 12 and clearly recognize these gifts Paul and Peter are talking about as spiritual gifts (speaking, serving, caring, leading, creating, singing, playing, giving). Here, Peter highlights just two gifts: speaking the word of God and serving, but that doesn’t mean the rest aren’t important.

Here in 1 Peter, the art of embracing charisma is experienced only when it is God who speaks and acts in the church’s speaking and acting. Thus, those who speak (preachers, teachers, missionaries, and any Christian who testifies to the truth of the Christian faith) are urged to consider their own speech the voice of God, and those who serve are to remember that the power at work in their ministry comes from God. This is the art and mystery of spiritual gifts. Our gifts are not for flaunting but for service. This is where we understand stewardship to God as we give of our time, talent, and treasure. Christian service is equal power and presence because it is God who is working in and through us. Each gift is needed and there is no place or need to recognize one gift as more important than another.

In the course of action with Prayer, Mutual Love, Hospitality, and embracing our gifts, there are three lessons we should keep in mind:

### Actions Speak Louder than Words

During a game, a coach asked one of his young players, “Do you understand what cooperation is? What a team is?” The little boy nodded yes. “Do you understand that what matters is winning together as a team?” The little boy nodded yes. “So,” the coach continued, “when a strike is called, or you are out at first, you don’t argue or curse, or attach the umpire. Do you understand all that?” Again, the boy nodded yes. “Good,” said the coach, “now go over there and explain it to your mother.” For any who have been around games lately you know that could easily be a father as well. But we get the point? When it comes to what we know, our actions can speak louder than words.

### Everyone together makes the best

I was sitting on the floor yesterday morning playing with Noah amidst two buckets worth of planes, trains, and automobiles. A large majority of the toys were from a popular kids series called “Super Wings”; a show in which one plane named Jet

delivers packages around the world. It never fails that Jet gets into some kind of trouble while in these various places, so he is always calling upon his airplane friends for help. Each member of the Super Wings has a special set of skills to help in whatever situation might arise. So yesterday, as I had Jet in one hand and Donnie, another Super Wing, in the other, I asked Noah who out of all the Super Wings made the best team. His answer was simple and brilliant; all of them Dad. All of them! Everyone together makes the best.

We can all help and be helped

For this we are going to do something together during our benediction...

(Hold your hands out in front of you and point both thumbs to the right. One palm should face up and the other should face down. As we join together in this call to serve and honor and glorify God, we must never forget that we are all needed: we are all capable of holding someone up and we are all in need of being held up.)

The aim of everything is that God should be glorified. It is to God's service we have been called, and all our words and works are to God's glory. To God alone belong all praise and authority, in this life and in the life to come.

Let all God's people say... Amen.