

1 Is there anyone here today who woke up and thought about your purpose for living today? That's not something that most of us normally do. When I roll out of bed on a Sunday morning, I make a beeline for the coffee pot, review the sermon and the rest of the worship plan for the morning, have breakfast, shower and get dressed, and then off I go, usually praying on my way to church. Seldom do I ever pause to wonder why I'm doing what I do- I just do it. I imagine that most of us are the same way. The timing of our routines might differ, but most of us simply wake up and do what has to be done.

I wonder how our lives might be different if we allowed God to interrupt our routines long enough for us to ponder the questions, "Why am I alive today? How is God at work in the world around me, and how can I join God in the work today?" Those can be pretty overwhelming questions, so for the next six weeks we're going to narrow the focus to giving: "How can I live to give today." By "giving," I don't mean just financial giving. I mean giving of our whole selves: Our service, sacrifices, hope, worship, and grace. God's very nature is one of self-giving for the sake of others, and as God's children, we're called to follow God's example of giving.

You'll be receiving a letter in the mail this week introducing this worship series and asking you to respond with not one, but two Stewardship Promise cards. The Promise cards are meant to be used in conjunction with each week's worship theme. Next week's theme is Sacrifices, and one of the cards you'll receive is meant for you to make your promise of living to give gifts sacrificially. You'll find a separate Stewardship Promise card with places for you to record your promise for the remaining four themes of Service, Hope, Worship, and Grace. Not coincidentally, each of these themes also corresponds with one of the promises we make when we join this church.

If you don't receive the letter and cards this week, we'll have extras in the lobby (also, please let us know that we missed you in the mailing so we can fix that). You could bring the cards with you to worship, or keep them at home and complete them after worship each week. Either way, please bring them back completed to worship on Sunday, November 18, when we'll consecrate our 2019 Stewardship Promises to God. We've made the responses as open-ended as possible this year, so that every person can find at least one way to grow in

each of these five ways to give. On November 25, we'll celebrate God's goodness and be reminded that we are also called to Live to Give Thanksgiving.

2 I've been pondering this month what it means to serve. In many restaurants, we're served by a professional food server. When our internet connection is knocked out by a storm, we complain that we don't have any service. When we come to worship on Sunday morning, we say we're attending a church service. When a person enlists in a branch of the military, we thank them for their service. And when pastors get together, we introduce ourselves by saying we serve a particular community. Clearly, service can mean many things, even in a church context. Typically, when the word service comes up during a fall church stewardship series, it refers to a long checklist of the various tasks and ministries that comprise the life of the church, a great many of which are required to keep the lights on and make the basic ministries of worship and Christian education happen. If you've been around here or just about any other church for any length of time, you've seen those checklists. I want to challenge you today to think more broadly about service, because each of us has a need to find our place in God's Kingdom where we can live to give service, not only to the life of the local church, but also to the whole of God's creation. Don't get me wrong, those tasks and ministries on the checklists are crucial to the life of our church. We didn't include the list this year in our mailing, but that doesn't mean we don't need your gift of service in leading the church, in teaching and mentoring our children and youth, in mowing the lawn, in ushering and greeting, in reading the Bible in church, in working the PowerPoint and sound board, and in so many other ways. But our call to live to give service also includes serving our brothers and sisters in our neighborhoods and in distant places. Consider this list offered by Jesus in Matthew 25, in which he echoes the words of Isaiah:

{Read Matthew 25:31-40 (MSG)}.

3 I don't especially like this list that Jesus left us. It makes me uncomfortable. Why? Because I haven't fed very many hungry people or given a drink to many thirsty people. Like most of us, I've done these things in fits and starts, maybe in an annual ministry event. I've actually met quite a few homeless people over the last twenty years of ministry, but it's only been a very few of them that I've managed to find a room for, and I've never actually offered any homeless person one of my own rooms. I've given clothing to a handful of

people who needed something to wear, but more often than not, my worn-out discards have been dumped in a donation box. As a pastor I have visited many sick people. Would I have visited as many if I wasn't a paid minister? I think over twenty years I've only made two or three visits to someone in prison.

I know that there are an endless number of rationalizations and excuses I could offer to excuse my lack of service to the poor, hungry, and homeless. I could say that I've served these people metaphorically, or served them indirectly through my giving, or I've been called to serve my family first, or any number of other excuses and half-truths. The truth is, all too often I've let my service to myself crowd out my service to other people. Nameless, voiceless, out-of-sight people are easy to ignore. This homeless encampment on Hiawatha Avenue that's been in the news is a temporary exception to that rule. In all likelihood, however, they'll be moved and then forgotten. Is there any way for people like me, and perhaps like you, to grow in faithfully serving God by serving other people?

4 Most of us have some realistic constraints on the time and energy that's available to us. Most of us have jobs, many of us have small children to care for, many of us have health or mobility limitations. But all of us can take at least one small step by promising God to grow in one particular way in serving others. Some of the lowest hanging fruit for serving others is right here in the ministries of our church and the Buffalo community. Here are some ideas for you: Chaperone or participate in the next youth mission trip. Contribute to or join the next We Can Be the Change weekend. Contribute to or help prepare a meal for the meals ministry, and then bring a meal to someone who needs it. Serve grieving people through our funeral meals ministry. Deliver meals this February for Meals on Wheels. Volunteer or contribute to the Buffalo Food Shelf, Love Inc, or the Crisis Nursery. Contribute to or help with the Christmas Day Dinner.

5 Attend a food packaging event at YWAM or Feed My Starving Children. Contribute to or serve at a Wesley Meal in Minneapolis on a fifth Saturday. Canvas the community with the Youth and Confirmation Class this Halloween as we collect food for the food shelf. Knit a shawl or donate a blanket. And yes, your prayer and your financial giving does matter to all these ministries, including your apportionment dollars that support UMCOR and a multitude of other ministries. But I want to challenge you, if you're physically able, to

personally engage at least one service ministry and see if God doesn't bless you ten times over. What's one concrete way that you can promise to serve in the coming year that represents a small step of growth in your commitment to live to give service?

6 Stewardship isn't about making ourselves feel bad because of what we haven't done.

On the other hand, stewardship can be a wake-up call that we are more abundantly gifted than we are typically aware, and that Jesus has laid out some pretty clear expectations about the ways in which we are to use our gifts to bless others. God didn't create us to rest forever in our favorite, most comfortable chairs. We were created to serve others, not at a minimum but extravagantly, sacrificially, after the example of Jesus.

How many of us here today could agree that whatever service we've joyfully given to others in the name of Jesus has always enlarged our hearts and added joy to our lives? If we're honest- and last week I did say that we need to be honest- then we can admit that sometimes we're reluctant to give up our time and energy to serve others. Sometimes we need a little help overcoming our inertia. That's why making a promise to serve is so important. It will provide you with a benchmark of accountability, a goal to reach and a reminder of your call. If you want to make that even stronger, share your promise to serve with a family member or friend. None of us really desire to be accountable, but most of us need the helping hand of a brother or sister to keep growing in our faith. Better yet, make a promise to serve together! Serving with friends can be even more rewarding.

Your challenge this week is to pause and look around at the needs of our church, your school, your neighborhood, and our world. You might see something on FaceBook, in the church bulletin or newsletter, or even on the street as you're walking or driving by. When you see someone in need, ask yourself this: Could I be the one God is calling to help? I sometimes wonder if simply having the eyes to see and the ears to hear is enough to constitute a divine call on our lives. What might happen in your life if you started acting in small ways when God prompted you like that? What might happen to our church, our neighborhoods, and the world? When we respond to God's call, not reluctantly but with joy, we really can be the change that's needed in our own lives and the lives of others.



Buffalo United Methodist Church

...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!



**609 8th Street NW
Buffalo, MN 55313
763-682-3538**

Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com