

**James 2:14-17**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

**Luke 6:27-42**

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

He also told them a parable: 'Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye", when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.

**“Can I Get Some Help with this Log?”****Rev. Joel Kershaw****April 13, 2008**

Confirmation is one of those funny things. I shared this with the confirmation class last night. When Jack was born, my oldest son, he was born down at Presbyterian St. Luke's and spent some time in the hospital there. One of his doctors was Dr. Hanson, and as usually happens in casual conversation, the topic of my profession comes up, and he asked me, "What do you do?" I said, "Well, I'm a Methodist minister." He said, "Really? Well, I'm Methodist." I said "Really, that's neat." He said, "My grandmother made me take confirmation three times because I kept failing." I am please to say that there are thirteen young people here among you who have not failed confirmation and will be hopefully, excited to join the church after the sermon today.

Now I want to turn to our Scripture, the Scripture so beautifully read by Reverend Dalke. At first glance, it seems that Jesus is calling us to simply work out our own problems before we got out helping people with theirs. Now, this is the typical evangelical and, yes, I said it, evangelical call of the Gospel. Our message of love and hope will only be heard if we are not contradicting the good news as we proclaim it. Our goal is always to help people with their specks, showing them the love of God, but it is always more effective if we tend to our own faith issues first. The implication here, of course, is that we don't usually operate like that. It is always easier to see how someone else needs to change, than to reflect on our own shortcomings. It's always easier to see where someone else is wrong than it is to mine our ideologies for imperfections. It is always easier to help people with their problems than it is to face our own demons. It is always easier to work on someone else.

Jack had surgery a couple of weeks ago, about four weeks ago actually. He had his cast off just this last week, and we were down talking with his wonderful orthopedic surgeon at the Presbyterian St. Luke's Hospital, and Abby was sharing with the doctor that we were going to have to postpone our coming back because Abby is having surgery in the first part of May. And then the doctor turned to us and said, 'You know, I understand the worry about surgery.' (This is an orthopedic surgeon, just so we're all clear.) "I have this bum knee, and it's been bothering me for years, but I was always afraid to go have it worked on." She said, "I know that anesthesia's safe, I use it a hundred times a year. I know that the procedures are sound, and that it will help, but I just couldn't make myself do it, till I finally just couldn't go any further." So she had the surgery, and she's been better than ever, ever since.

Now, this is the region's foremost pediatric orthopedic surgeon. In the region. And she was afraid to go under the knife. She was afraid to seek the help that she was offering to people every day. For the good doctor, it was easier to go on helping others than it was to face her own problems and her own solutions. There's another implication, though, I think, of this passage, that I noticed when I read it again. Yes, Jesus is calling us to work on ourselves, but then we must move on to help others. We must move on. We sometimes miss that. Yeah, we know we've got to work on our own stuff before we go out, but the point is, we're supposed to go out and help others. We're not to focus on our own problems and leave everyone else alone. That's not what we're called to do. We are to move beyond ourselves, eventually. I think, if we're really honest with ourselves, everyone has a log or two or perhaps even three, that we're always working on. We're never quite finished bettering ourselves, but that should not stop us from helping others.

I see this passage as a call, a call to help each other with the logs. Can I get some help with my log, please? Can I get some help with my log? And yes, I, and every other minister that you know, and have ever known, has a log or two or three, or maybe some of us even have a whole forest of logs that we need to deal with, and we need your help. Can I get some help with my log? We all need some help with the logs of life. Sometimes we whittle the log down to a toothpick, and then we discover that the first one was only blocking our view of the whole river of logs coming straight at us. We all need help with our logs. Can I get some help with mine? Can I get some help with mine?

All this lumber talk points us to one inevitable conclusion that just might be the biggest log of all. We need each other. We need each other in this thing we call faith. We cannot walk this faithful road less traveled on our own. We need each other. Yes, in most sermons here would insert that we always have Jesus with us, and that might be the case, but I'm talking about the people sitting in the pews right next to you. I'm talking about the people in the other services who you might never see, but they're there, every week. I'm talking about the youth who, until today, were holed up in their basement. I'm talking about the stampede of children that marches out of here at 9:25 every morning. I'm talking about those who may not be able to make it here in body, but who are always here in spirit. I'm talking about people. People. We need each other, on this faithful road less traveled. We need each other. We need to be willing to reach out to people across the aisle. Across the doughnut table, God forbid. Across the worship time. Across the generations. Across the building down the hall, out the door, across the street. I'm talking about reaching out to others beyond our comfortable spot in the sanctuary, beyond our comfortable spot in the chapel, or on the committee we serve on, or the choir we sit in, or the children's time that we celebrate. Whatever niche you carve out in this place, I'm talking about reaching out beyond that comfort zone, reaching out and opening up to people, and that is how we find help with our logs. That is how we discover people who have the same problems that we do, and maybe have a solution. We cannot go it alone.

Being a minister, you get into some weird conversations with people, like the good doctor at Presbyterian. Most people eventually come around to "What do you do?" and I then have to say, "I'm a minister." I'm not ashamed of that, but it usually changes the conversation at that point. Maybe you guys have experienced that. The conversation usually shifts to some justification about why they missed church last week, or the last time they went, "Good Easter service, Pastor." Or something like the doctor who tells me he failed confirmation. He told us that story about three or four times, by the way, in the two months we were there. But inevitably I hear this, especially from young people, that "I'm spiritual, I'm just not religious." You've heard that, haven't you? "I'm spiritual, just not religious." Now, that's fine. I don't get it. I don't get it. Now, I'm a minister, so maybe I'm not supposed to get it, but I don't get it. I don't get the "spiritual but not religious," and here's why. Because you see, "spiritual," that implies a connection with God. That implies being connected with an Almighty or a Creator or some force that sort of is an undercurrent for all that is. That's your connection, but that doesn't live up to the call of the Gospel. That isn't faith. That isn't the faith that I believe, the faith that asks us to love God, but love each other as well. We can't do that in isolation. We can't love each other in isolation.

So when people tell me they're spiritual but not religious, I say, "You need someone else, and in that relationship with someone else, you are religious. That is religion. Now, you may not fit in a neat little religion box. You might not sit comfortably in United Methodism, or Presbyterianism, or Catholicism. You might not fit neatly in the religious box of Christianity or Judaism or Islam. You may not fit in any of those "isms" that are out there, defining people. But you are religious, if you have faith, because you have to have faith with community. Community demands faith, because we cannot love each

other alone. We cannot go it alone as individuals, we cannot go it alone as a church, either. That is what is so beautifully aggravating about the United Methodist denomination. Beautifully aggravating, and I mean that sincerely. Reverend Schuster will be heading the General Conference in a couple of weeks. Some of you may have heard his reflections on the things that he will face when he gets to Texas, and if you haven't, you probably should. He's very entertaining, puts a great perspective on General Conference. But the last time he was at General Conference, he sat with a friend of Pam's and mine. He sat with Brad Larvick. Brad's kind of a computer geek, and he was on his computer one day, and in the midst of their debating homosexuality and who knows what other issues divide people in the United Methodist Church and elsewhere, he was looking to see what the nation, the media, had to say about this United Methodist denomination meeting, and fighting over things. And he discovered that they weren't looking too favorably on us, the United Methodist church so divided. And so he grabbed his laptop, and Apple, I might add. There's a bit of a computer war happening in our office right now. Takes his Apple laptop up to one of the bishops and talks to them and before the end of the conference, we had a Declaration of Unity approved by the United Methodist Church. Now, I won't go into the irony of the United Methodist Church declaring before the world its unity – but, we declared our unity. Because we can't turn our backs, no matter how much we dislike the opinion of another person, or another group of people, or half the country, or half the world. No matter how much we dislike the people, or how much we disagree with people, we can't leave them behind. We cannot leave them behind, and that is what is beautifully aggravating about the United Methodist church is, we are united even though we are the craziest bunch of people you've ever met. Own it, people, own it. It's beautiful.

We may feel like ditching people at times. We may feel like splitting off and doing our own thing, and not fighting all the time over every little thing. It would be so easy to just throw out, leave behind, turn our backs, split off from the people with whom we disagree. But that is not the call of the Gospel, not the Gospel I read. We are not told to turn our cheeks as we turn away and walk off. We're told to offer the other cheek. We're not called by Jesus in Luke's Gospel to love those who love us, as David so eloquently read, but love our enemies. Now, we may think of enemies in terms of fighting and war and political elections, red states and blue states, *ad nauseum*. Too often we think that we must work the hardest to love the people who are so vastly different from us. But the reality is sometimes it's harder, maybe the hardest, to love the people who are so close to us in the way we think and where we are. Christians are notorious for our logs that keep us from seeing what we have in common, because we are too busy focusing and fighting and bickering over what we don't.

I saw a commercial that kind of jarred me this week. Sometimes you're watching television and you see a commercial that just sort of takes the wind out of you. Up on the screen pops Al Sharpton. Now for some of you that might be troubling enough. But sitting next to him is Pat Robertson, and for some of you that might be troubling enough. But here they are, sitting on a couch together on my television screen one night. Al starts off and he says, "You know what? Pat and I don't have much in common, big surprise there. But we do have one thing in common, and that's we believe that we have to be

good stewards of our environment. That we have to take care of the world that we have been entrusted by God with, and that is our common goal. So we may not agree on much, but we can agree on this, and we're going to work together to make this world a better place." Isn't that beautiful? As jarring as Al Sharpton and Pat Robertson might be sitting on a couch together? That's beautiful. That's overlooking your differences to come together to do God's work.

Sometimes we're too busy fighting over our differences, that we miss the opportunity to do God's work, to love each other, to help with the logs of life, to recognize that despite our differences, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We don't even have to stop at Christianity. We can recognize that despite our differences we can all be brothers and sisters in God, in the creation, in humanity. We can't go it alone as a church, we can't go it alone as Christianity, we can't go it alone because we are together. I think this helping people with their specks and getting help with our logs is what James was talking about when he said faith without works is dead. It might surprise you to learn that Martin Luther, that famed reformed of the church, considered cutting James from the New Testament, for this very purpose. You see, Luther believed that it was by faith alone that we find God, not faith and works.

I might be wrong, or I might just be Methodist, but I think even he had to acknowledge that faith cannot be contained. Faith cannot turn a blind eye to people in need. Faith cannot allow us to kick out those who are different from us. Faith will not last, or grow, or do anybody any good, if we don't let it inspire us to reach beyond ourselves. That's works, people. That's works. Reaching beyond ourselves Faith inspiring works. Faith can become that unattended log in our eye that blocks us from seeing God in everything we encounter, if we are not moved by our faith into action. Into action. So I ask you this morning, what is your faith moving you to do? Part of finding our way to putting faith into action, working on those pesky logs, is to find your own unique way to get involved, to pinpoint how our individual talents and passions and convictions might just help mold and shape the world into the one visioned by God and called for by Christ. You don't have to be a celebrity boasting a large fanbase to make a difference in the world. You don't have to be a powerful church leader, or even a minister, to change the world with your faith. There are people of passion and skill finding ways to make a difference every day. Every day.

I was listening to NPR this week, as I was preparing for the sermon. It's amazing what NPR can feed you. There's a choir of eighty-somethings, I won't ask you to identify who fits that category, eighty-somethings in Massachusetts who are singing punk rock. It may not have been pretty, but it was beautiful. Eighty-somethings singing punk rock, to prove that you're never too old to try something new. I won't even get into Al Sharpton and Pat Robertson again. But we have things right here. What about the One Great Hour of Sharing that we're taking up today. That collection goes to help people all over the world. UMCOR is everywhere. Everywhere. We don't even have to go that far. What about Rob Bean and his Big Moo Canoe. He's got some buddies together, if you don't know what I'm talking about, you will soon, it'll be hard to miss. He and his buddies are helping raise funds and awareness for the Heifer Project, to feed people. Our choir, and the

Stompers, who by the way are at the Wellington Fellowship today, and Fish, they'll be playing at the contemporary service in a few hours. Those groups share the love of God by channeling their talents into something beautiful. Think about the requiem. We had a packed house here. We're the envy of every church in the nation, because we had a packed house on Good Friday, because our choir is amazing, sharing the love and grace of God through music. What about Fish, who offers an alternative worship service that feeds the hungry in spirit and in body. The Stompers who, though slightly quirky, love the grace of God. It just pours out of their horns, it's amazing. I'm talking about the Columbarium Task Force, they built a beautiful facility out there. They built a facility that will allow people an inexpensive alternative for honoring their loved ones in a place that means something to them. That's beautiful. I'm talking about Forrest Walters and Warren Mauk, who are always in some kind of trouble. The trouble they're into now is starting to gain support for a petition at Annual Conference to set up an interfaith intercultural dialogue group that will promote communication, reaching across the aisle, that's beautiful. I'm talking about Jim Cowell and Warren Mauk and countless others from our church who have gone to start that Wellington Fellowship. There's a worshipping congregation just a few miles from here because of people's commitment. I'm talking about Ross Loomis and Frankie Parson and the rest of the people who are helping to revitalize the Wesley Foundation for college students here at CSU. That's going to be amazing. That's going to be amazing, but we can't do it alone. I might be biased, but there are fifteen or so adults who dedicate time and energy to working with our young people, to helping me help them grow in their faith. That's beautiful. Volunteers with nothing more than a driver's license and a little extra time on Sunday to go around and pick up people, bring them to church. That's getting involved, that's using your talents, that's going the extra mile. I could go on for hours, but I don't want to because I don't want to put you to sleep and have you miss the most important message I think I have for you today. The most important message I have for you this morning, and that is, this church has you. It has you, and you.