

Divine Doing

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June 1, 2008 Romans 1.16-17; Matthew 7.21-29

My great-aunt Gladys was not much of a church go-er. She preferred gardening to religion and so she spent her Sundays, and most days, tending her gardenia and rose bushes, her pepper plants and grape vines, her petunias and strawberries.

Now, Aunt Gladys was a member of a parish, but presidential administrations, hairstyles, and hem lines had all changed since she had seen the inside of a church. In fact, ministers had come and gone since she had been to her own church.

One day the new pastor of the church had heard of this wayward congregant, so he decided to pay her a call, perhaps he could charm her into returning to worship.

Without giving her any warning, the pastor drove to my great-aunt's house. She was sitting on the front porch, resting in fact from having weeded the flower beds. The pastor, in clerical collar, walked up and said, "How do ma'am? You and Jesus sure have a beautiful garden!" To which my great-aunt snapped, "Yeah, Jesus and I have a beautiful garden now but it didn't look like much when Jesus had it by himself."

She knew that what God does for us, God must do through us. OUR hands are God's hands; WE are the embodiment, the incarnation of God in our world. God AND us have work to do, because clearly God either cannot or will not do it without us.

I once heard a debate between an atheist and a minister; the atheist asked, "What kind of God would have allowed the holocaust?" And the minister replied, "the more important question is what kind PEOPLE would have allowed the holocaust?"

With God, all things are possible, but "with" implies a partnership. The creation myth in the 2nd chapter of Genesis shows that God can start a garden, but needs a gardener to do the work. God may be omnipresent, but only in relationship does God become omnipotent.

We can sing hymns and recite creeds and quote scripture, but that's the easy part.

God needs us to do something, to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. "Not every person who cries 'Lord, Lord' is part of a heavenly reality; but only those who carry out the divine will."

What is the divine will?

According to Jesus, it's the golden Rule – “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you” (Matthew 7.12).

In stories of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal son, the woman at the well, the feeding of hungry multitudes, the touching of people who were considered untouchable...Jesus demonstrates what the work and the will of God are.

Jesus is speaking and acting in the prophetic tradition: “You know what is required of you, ONLY to do justice and love mercy and live humbly with your God” (Micah 6.8).

It's not about what we claim to believe.

It's not about what we call ourselves.

It's not about how pious our language is.

Not everyone who cries Lord, Lord...Not everyone who uses religious language understands the good news.

To build our spiritual house on a rock, we must do the will of God. We can have all kinds of opinions and beliefs, but only what we do will bring about peace and justice in our world.

Why do we collect food every month?

Why are we present in Jamaica to help resist lethal homophobia?

Why do we offer ministry to three assisted living facilities?

Why do we value the questions more than the answers?

Why do we offer affordable classes to promote spiritual growth?

Why do we try to expand our theological language to honor the sacred value of women as well as men?

Why do we challenge ourselves to see God in new ways, ways that are more inclusive and life-giving?

Why do we affirm the goodness of our body-selves?

Why do we confront our own prejudices so that we can then be a healing force in the world?

Why do we try to renounce some of our privilege so that others can experience fairness?

Why are we trying to get our progressive, positive, practical message out to as many people as possible in as many ways as possible?

Why do we take responsibility for our lives by coming down these aisles and standing with our sisters and brothers in united prayer every week?

Why do we do all that work?

Because the good news is that God, with and through us, can bring hope and healing to our world. The more we do, the more God will do, through and as us. When we work for justice...not privilege, not prestige, not position, but when we work for justice...not JUST US, but Justice...When we do justice and love mercy and live humbly - THAT is the power of God in action. And this is the good news. Amen.

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*My hands are God's hands.
I am God's partner.
I am a channel for God's healing love.
As I do the work of God...
I experience hope, peace, and joy.
And so it is!
Amen.*

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