

**November 22: Why Give: Service: 8:30 Part 1**  
**Scriptural Lesson: Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24**  
**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

**We are continuing with our Why Give Sermon Series and this week we will focus on why we might give in the area of service.**

So in this particular sermon I am speaking directly to the heart of the individual.

**I am preaching to you;** as you may be taking the first sip of your morning coffee or perhaps you are snuggling in your warm bed watching the service online; no judgment here because if I could preach to you from my bed...that would be heaven for sure!

**I am preaching also to myself,** because they say that some of the best sermons are the ones that speak and preach to the preacher first;

So wherever you are, I am talking to you; I am taking to me and what I want all of us to do is stop and think for a moment on these upcoming questions;

Where would you be right now if you did not have a support system of some sort, whether it be your family, friends, church family and so forth?

Where would any of us be if it were not for the people that surround us, prays for us, thinks about us and responds accordingly to whatever the Spirit of the Lord may be whispering in our ears and tugging at our spirits to do?

**Whether it be** the unexpected card that came in the mail for you with a heart felt word of encouragement;

**Or a meal** delivered to your doorstep because of your household being quarantined;

**Whether it is the shoulder** that was lended to you at the right time for you to lean on or cry on;

Or perhaps you received an unexpected but timely phone call that provided the words that you needed to hear, at the right place; at the right time;

Folks all that I have shared with you and more is the heart of what service is all about.

**Living a life of service** is all about living our lives with the intentionality that we are indeed one another's keepers; regardless if we are biologically related; For in the kingdom of heaven, I stopped by to suggest and proclaim that we are all related; We are all connected; We are all interconnected; And I believe that we will find in our scriptures not just for today, but throughout the entire bible; God designed it to be this way.

When God the Creator looked at Adam and realized that he needed a help mate; I believe that God in God's infinite wisdom in many ways created us all with the intentions of us being one another's help mates.

This is why stories like the two miracle stories of the disciples feeding 5000 people and their families 5 fish and a couple of loaves ( found in all of the gospels) and then the second feeding of 4000 people with 7 loaves and 2 fish (Mark and Matthew); was such a miracle

Not necessarily because Jesus was able to do some sort of magic where the people had basketfuls of bread and fish leftover...although I would imagine I would be awestruck if I were there;

But perhaps the greatest miracle was **that for one split second**, everyone was able to come together and share their thoughts, resources and skills together;

Perhaps that was the greatest miracle;

That at those moments, no one was concerned whether they were Jew or Gentile, Circumcised/uncircumcised, Black or White, pro choice/pro life, republican/democrat, independent; pro vaccination/anti vaxxers and the list goes on and on;

**None of that mattered for that one moment;**

All that mattered was being in service with one another; that was the main priority;

In fact in these particular stories, it was the willingness for the people to participate in the act of service that most likely saved their lives;

It certainly sustained their lives; so much so that perhaps the next time, they may not panic as much if they were to run out of food, for if they learned anything from Jesus that day, they hopefully learned that they were stronger together than a part.

As long as they had one another, no one should ever starve.

The Spirit of the Lord would make sure of that.

*For where two or three are gathered; Christ is present,* thus says the Lord in Matthew 18:20. Amen!

**And then shifting to our scripture of Ezekiel today, we see another example of service;**

For the major way that we see God's love play out is by way of service.

As I unpack this text for us this morning, the **Book of Ezekiel** is the third of the [Latter Prophets](#) in the [Tanakh](#) and one of the [major prophetic](#) books in the [Old Testament](#), following [Isaiah](#) and [Jeremiah](#).

According to the book itself, it records six visions of the [prophet Ezekiel](#), exiled in Babylon, during the 22 years from 593 to 571 BC, although it is the product of a long and complex history and does not necessarily preserve the very words of the prophet.

So in our passage of scripture today, we are seeing the contrast between the national leaders and God and it **is striking**.

For God promises to search, seek, and supply the needs of God's scattered sheep; whereas some of the leaders of that time, seeking the needs of others was not their priority.

But just like a good shepherd, God will gather the flock and bring them back **into their own land**.

This prophecy clearly refers to the promised return from captivity, which was fulfilled in 536 b.c. when Cyrus the Great uttered his decree (Ezra 1:1f.).

In verse 16 God promises God's own tenderness for the weak and needy sheep.

Then the second part of our scripture (vs 20-24) in my research reveals that once the divine Shepherd takes over the flock there are three things that He will do. First, He will judge between **sheep and sheep**; distinguishing between the *selfless* and the *selfish* of the people of God.

Second, He will set up **one shepherd**. David represented the ideal king of Israel; the coming prince would be one like David....and we know who that will be... Jesus; the Prince of Peace!

Third, He will make a **covenant of peace**.

A covenant of peace where the *land* of Israel and the *people* of Israel will both be blessed.

But in all of this that is going on in the text, I wanted to highlight that the driving force of **God's actions is service**.

For in all of God's vastness and sovereignty, the one thing that really sticks out in my mind from this passage of scripture, is that God's main focus is and always will be the well being of God's creation.

God the good shepherd cannot and will not rest until all of the sheep could be accounted for.

And this description of the character of God should not surprise us because from the beginning when God approached Cain and asked where his brother was;

And Cain's flippant response was "Am I my brother's keeper?"

One could infer that service was very important to God.

One could even possibly conclude that God felt this to be Cain's ultimate responsibility; to know and care where his brother's whereabouts were.

In fact, the longer I live, I am beginning to sense that what matters to God most is that our answer to this question is yes, we are our brother/sister's keepers!

This is one of the driving values that fuels the 10 commandments, because not following the commandments are the antithesis of service.

This is the driving force behind Jesus commandment to love God and love neighbor....service.



For the reality is that just as the 5 love language book by Gary Chapman reveals that how we love typically is through words of affirmation, physical touch, quality time, gift-giving and acts of service; one thing for sure is that you and I are not able to achieve the full potential of love without service.

For service per the United Methodist Church is how you and I live out our faith every day; through acts of loving service.

We strive to be active in our communities, reaching out to neighbors in need.

Through our global connection of congregations and agencies, we participate in ministries thousands of miles from where we live.

In our doing good, we seek to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

So again for me, our love and our acts of service go hand in hand.

In fact our service is a tangible way that we show our love towards one another.

**So shifting gears a bit as I allow us all to absorb all that I have shared, it occurred to me then what the answer might be to the embedded question that I have raised in a few of my sermons over these past few weeks; the question of “how long Lord?”**

The Israelites wanted to know **how long** they were going to be in the wilderness.

I suspect that many of us too are wondering **how long will our own wilderness experiences last?**

**How long** will this racial tension last?

**How long** will this overall divisiveness last?

**How long** will these climate control issues last?

**How long** will this economic depression last?

**How long** will this pandemic last?

This upcoming Thanksgiving/Christmas for example, I would imagine will be especially challenging for most of us, since we are advised not to travel due to the virus.

So with this reality and more, I would imagine that a lot of us by now are shouting out to the universe **how long?**

For when we are in these wilderness moments, it is difficult not to ask this question....**how long?**

Looking back at the stories of the feeding of the multitudes, I would imagine they too wanted to know **how long** they would be hungry?

Looking at our scripture today of the shepherd, inquiring minds may wonder **how long** will the shepherd be out there seeking out his sheep?

**Taking all of these stories in the Bible and applying it to where we are today, I wonder if we are asking the right questions?**

I wonder as God the shepherd is seeking the sheep out; distinguishing between the selfless and selfish if the answer to our question of how long may already be before us?

For if you remember I outlined three things that our Ezekiel prophecy is outlining for us per my researching the

passage; (1) God is distinguishing among the sheep; b/t the selfless and the selfish; (2) one shepherd will lead the sheep; (3) from there a covenant of peace will be established among the land where the people will dwell in which they will then all be blessed;

So looking at this, I wonder if humanity is missing a key step here that is strongly implied but not named directly; So if I were to detect where the missing step is in my theological mind, it would be between point 2 and 3.

So without confusing anyone too much, let me then suggest for kicks and giggles that we move the covenant of peace to step (4) thereby opening up a vacancy for step (3);

And inquiring minds then might ask “then Kirstie, whatever should step (3) be?”

And my response would be, “I am so glad that you asked; for step (3) is where you and I come in as well as the Israelites in our text.

For right now, the way these three points are listed as a stand alone, God is doing all of the work.

God is doing all of the service;

God is doing all of the seeking;

God is doing it all;

And so what happens if I leave this the way it is, if you and I are not careful, this is how God ends up getting the blame for when things go wrong in our lives.

This is when the skewed theology comes along that God caused the pandemic or God caused whatever calamity that has fallen upon us and friends I just don't believe that about the God we serve.

**God does not cause** the calamities that surround us, but God does allow them to happen.

This is because God **allows free will to happen.**

So the reason why I am recommending that there be an extra step placed between step 2 and 3 is because **at some point**, there needs to be a response to all that God has laid out for us **from us.**

**At some point** you and I will need to decide with our free will choice, whether or not we are going to follow God's ways of love and service or not and depending on our response, I believe this is what determines when our covenant of peace will come.

For I believe peace **will come** once we learn how to come together.

I believe that our true blessings **will come** once we realize that **it comes when we come together;**

I believe that **our true** kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven will come once we come together;

I believe that how the wilderness opens up a clear path;

How streams appear in the wasteland;

How healing and resurrection manifests.....is **when we come together.**

I believe how the captives are set free, and the wounds of the broken-hearted are bound up is **when we come together....**

So the greater question might not be how long towards God but us asking ourselves **how long before we see that we are in this together?**

**How long will it be before we all choose to come together?**

For once we understand that *All things work **together** for those who love the Lord and are called according to God's purposes* (Romans 8:28)

Once we can wrap our heads and hearts around the fact that **acts of loving service is how we work together;**

Then we have our answer;

For "how long" I believe with my whole heart and mind depends on us.

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**Sermon Series: Why Give: Service 10:45am Part 2**  
**First Lesson: Psalm 100**  
**Gospel Lesson: Matthew 25:31-46**  
**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

**We are continuing with our Why Give sermon series; a series that looks at why we should give in the areas of prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.**

And today I am inviting us to examine why we should give as it pertains to service.

For unlike the earlier sermon where I invited us to consider this charge on an individual level; today we are



looking at why give in the area of service as a collective church body.

And before diving directly in our gospel today, I am excited because the theological nerd I have become, can directly see why Ezekiel 34 was one of the readings for this week in which I preached from in the earlier service,

And this is because the prophet Ezekiel predicted the same exact parable that Jesus is sharing with his disciples in our gospel today.

So it is nice how we can directly see the Old Testament and the New Testament correlate in such a perfect and seamless way; so I encourage you to listen to part 1 of this sermon to learn more about the Ezekiel text.

So in our gospel today, the foretold great Shepherd has come, Jesus and it might be of interest for some of you to learn that scholars are not entirely in agreement on whether this is actually a parable or not.

This is because verses 31-46 which we are not looking at today does not play out like a parable but rather a description of the last judgment.”

Nevertheless our passage today is included in the many lists of parables of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the value of the passage is not affected by this question of whether this is a true parable or not.

And this is because in my eyes, the sentiment is the same as I preached earlier; that God is most concerned with not how many scriptures you and I can recite from memory; (and I am glad because this is not my gift)

Nor is God even concerned I am convinced with how many church committees you or I may be serving on; for if our heart is not in the right place when we are doing the things we are doing, then this is not something that impresses God at all;

For when the United Methodist Church is inviting us to serve, what is being asked from us is to serve with a

measure of selflessness whether our deeds are recognized or even acknowledged;

We are being invited to serve in such a way where our love becomes a force that cannot be reckoned with.

For service per the United Methodist Church is how you and I live out our faith every day; through acts of loving service.

Service is where we strive to be active in our communities, reaching out to neighbors in need.

Through our global connection of congregations and agencies, we participate in ministries thousands of miles from where we live.

In our doing good, we seek to be a blessing to all the families of the earth; not because it just feels good although it does;

But it is because we understand that we serve a God who depends on us to be the vessels that carry out the work of the Spirit.

**So my biggest revelation that I would like to expound upon is where I ended in my earlier sermon; that so many times I hear people blame God when things are not going right in the world.**

We tend to ask God, why God allows certain things to happen in the world.

We may ask God why so many are sick and dying from the Coronavirus?

We may ask God why God could not fix our marriages or heal our cancer or grant justice to those who deserve it or grant judgment to those who do wrong?

It is our human tendency to want God to fix things that are wrong in our lives and in the world.

**If God is so great**, then why doesn't God just reset things back to the way that it should be?

**If God is so loving**, then how can God allow the rich to get richer and the poor to stay stuck in poverty?

**If God cares for us** then how can God watch as babies suffer and children are neglected?

**If God is so sovereign** then why is God not responding to God's children that are trying to do the right thing day in and day out?

Along these lines, just last night I sent a message of encouragement to the Bryan medical staff to plant the seed of Galatians 6:9 within them; *to not get tired of doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

I hope that this message encourages the health workers.

To be honest though, **I know that sometimes** it is difficult to be encouraged when you can't see the end to the misery in sight.

**I know that sometimes** it is difficult to have hope when it seems as if God is not actively listening.

**And so taking all of these complex questions and the feelings that may come with them to our passage today, Jesus may be giving the disciples and perhaps us a different response to some of these questions that I just raised than we intended on hearing.**

For as I put Jesus statements into my own words, Jesus does not share that when the Son of Man comes in all his glory, that the Son of Man will come with answers to any of the questions that I have raised.

In fact the assumed parable does not indicate that the Son of Man came to answer any of our questions of why at all. Instead, we are told through this story that it will be a day of judgment; where you and I will be sorted out like the sheep and the goats;

And the Ezekiel research that I did really sheds some light on this parable because in the Ezekiel prophecy, he prophesied that the reason for this sorting out is that the **Son of Man will be most interested** in distinguishing between the selfless and the selfish.

**The Son of Man will be most interested** in distinguishing between the righteous and the self righteous.

So what all of this tells me, is that there is an embedded hope and expectation that God has for all of us.... and this is where our free will comes in that I preached on earlier.

The free will choice that you and I will need to consider is will we live a life of service to God and one another or a life of self?

And for God this is not a trick question designed to trip us up;

For I believe that God will put many opportunities for us to step outside of ourselves and to partake in service, but the reality is that this is a decision that only you and I can make on our own.

The good news is that I do believe that somewhere, somehow, the Spirit does become irresistible for most of us;

For the Spirit may bring a person in our lives that may inspire us to do more or grow in who we are;

Or perhaps we may have been impacted by something in our lives that caused us to want to do more for that cause or situation.

So the good news I wholeheartedly believe is that the God we serve will not leave us hanging; the Spirit is always at work.

Furthermore, God will give us every opportunity to learn and grow in our faith and serve as a result.

**But I'm not going to lie folks, this parable does give me some anxiety.**

Questions that come up within me as a church leader is am I doing enough?

Is the church doing enough?

How can I do more?

How can the church do more?

But this is when I have to breathe and I am inviting you to breathe as well, because although the words of this passage can be unsettling to the A type personality such



as myself; this passage is not designed to produce anxiety or guilt from my perspective.

For unpacking the parable a little further **Sheep** are proverbially good creatures, and **goats** bad.

The **right hand** is the place of honor, **the left** that of dishonor (v. 33).

So the judgment is on the basis of the way individuals have acted toward the needy about them (vv. 34–36).

In our story, the **righteous** are surprised to learn that they have merited commendation (v. 37–39)—

They learn that what they have done to the sick and suffering, the lonely and the needy, they have in reality done to Christ Himself (v. 40).

In contrast, those **on the left hand** are not commended but condemned.

This is because they have failed to minister to those in need (vv. 42–45).

But the aha moment is that to the church, the greatest charge for the collective body is to have a social conscience.

And to make sure that we are on the same page; having a social conscience means the state of being aware of the problems that affect a lot of people in society such as poverty, homelessness, racial oppression and more.

**So when I unpack this passage in this manner both individually and collectively I am encouraged because folks this is something we can all work on.**

In fact, looking at the ministerial context in which we are in; a reconciling ministry whose story reflects a statement of diversity and love for all. We are a church that seeks to be inclusive to all persons regardless of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation; I stopped by to say that **we are working on these things so that we can become more socially conscious.**

Looking at the work that Dr. Spilker is doing with race relations and the work of equity; Terri Storer who is focused on building compassion and planting small groups that continue to make us more socially conscious and aware; I celebrate again **that we are doing this work.**

Not to mention the work that we are doing with the Food Bank, Matt Talbot kitchen and more only scrapes the service **of the great work that we are doing and will continue to do;**

But the biggest aha moment that I have concluded from the former list of tough questions that I asked earlier of why do essentially bad things happen to good people?

The earlier service I raised a similar question but asked it in a slightly different way; how long will we have to endure this (and you get to fill in the blank)?

But the revelation that I have gleaned from both Ezekiel's prophecy and Jesus response is that you and I are part of the answer to both of these questions.

For it is our service that God will bless;

It is our loving service that God will anoint;

It is you and I investing in the act of service with the Holy Spirit fueling our efforts, that will bring forth the peace that we have been longing for;

That will turn thy kingdom come thy will be done;

**It is you and I**, fueled by the Holy Spirit that will help release the captives free;

That will restore sight to the blind;

That will help those stand who have been trampled;

**It is you and I**, fueled by the Holy Spirit that will help restore this Earth back to the way it was intended to be;

For we are not onlookers, waiting on God;

On the contrary the hope is that we will become willing vessels; eager and active participants; that will step up to the plate and pour into this kingdom on Earth, one person at a time; one service at a time; one cause at a time; one situation at a time; one family at a time;

So how long must we endure?

Why are these things happening?

And all of the questions that may come up in our hearts  
and mind;

The Spirit of the Lord has empowered me to respond and  
let the world know that God is ready;

God is willing;

God is just waiting on you...

God is just waiting on me.....

The great Potter is waiting on all of us; to mold us and use  
us in a mighty way;

So don't worry about failing, for God has created you and  
God has created me for such a time as this!

And like Joshua 21:45 tells us; *God keeps God's Word.*  
*Not one of God's good promises has ever failed, not*  
*before the time of Joshua, not after, and not now.*

Let the Church say Amen and Hallelujah!

