

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

September 23 – 24, 2023

Do Your Duty

Isaiah 55:6–9

“Duties are ours, events are God’s; When our faith goes to meddle with events, and to hold account upon God’s Providence, and beginneth to say, ‘How wilt Thou do this or that?’ we lose ground; we have nothing to do there; it is our part to let the Almighty exercise His own office, and steer His own helm; there is nothing left for us, but to see how we may be approved of Him, and how we roll the weight of our weak souls upon Him who is God omnipotent, and when we thus essay miscarrieth, it shall be neither our sin nor our cross.”

Samuel Rutherford, quoted in *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them*,
Ruth Bell Graham, 1991, Focus on the Family Publishing, p. 106

Now, you may not understand that, hearing it for the first time today, and that’s OK, it’s King James English...and I think we can all agree why we don’t use that translation anymore. It is hard for the modern listener to hear and understand.

So, I encourage you to go to <https://www.faitheustis.org/news-resources...sermons>
Print a copy of it or clip it onto your phone so you can look at it again and again to understand how beautiful this text is, and how important it is to understand the peace we have in Christ.

But for right now, all you need to know is, “Duties are ours; events are God’s.”
That’s the phrase we use amongst pastors when we are struggling with the challenges of church and ministry. It is especially used when someone comes along in a presentation, or from the hierarchy, or just wants to sell something to the church with the alarming cry, of all that ails the church, saying, “We gotta do something now!!!”

That simple statement implies a lot, and it’s not just reserved for the church. It goes with problems in the community, it goes with our national politics, it goes with social decay, it goes with how we are caring for and raising our children, it applies to the economy...so on, and so forth, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera...

So, you have heard this statement in your social circles, at work, and in the community. It is not a statement unique to the church, after all, “We gotta do something!”
But I know for sure, knowing y’all like I do...I don’t think for a second you are doing nothing, especially here at church, but even then, I know how hard almost all of you are working apart from the church too!

It would be criminal to suggest “we gotta do something” implies you are doing nothing...nothing could be farther from the truth. But sometimes I think saying, “We gotta do something” might imply we are doing the wrong thing right now! Ok, possibly, but the other possibility is: How much worse could it be if we were not doing what we are doing...and we must weigh that carefully every time we endeavor to “do something.” After all, how do we know “Something” is the right “Thing”. The truth is we don’t and may not find out, until we do, the wrong thing.

Now, please hear me clearly. Sometimes doing the wrong thing leads to the right thing...eventually. But it is a painful route if it turns out what we were doing all along was the right thing to begin with.

So, I am not a big fan of the “We gotta do something” crowd mentality. I would much rather we crowd together, determine what our duty is, and let God handle the events. And we have significant experience with that here at Faith in our history as a church and school ministry.

Many of you remember the economic collapse of 2008. It was my first year at Faith and one of hardest years in the ministry for the school. It was also a devastating year for all Lutheran schools in Florida. The “We gotta do something” crowd was out in full force all over the state and in our community. After all, the bubble of high prices on houses crashed and homes were foreclosed on. To this day I remember nearly every other home vacant on my short 2-mile commute to church.

Our school went from an all-time high of over 270 students to just above 200 students in a year. Some, because they couldn’t afford tuition anymore, some because they moved to other states to find work, and some because their lives were devastated related to the economy, and we never heard from them again. It really did seem like, “we needed to do something” to stem the flow of loss and ruin. But the big question was, “So, what DO we do?”

Who knows the answer to that, I mean truly absolutely knows, so much that you would even suggest they can divine the future? That’s right...nobody. So not even knowing who Samuel Rutherford was, and that he even wrote a book called *Prodigals and those who love them*; we, *focused* on our duties and left the events to God.

Not so with the other schools in Florida. Some generated heaping debt to cover the loss of income, some paid lavishly for consultants and coaches who claimed they had all the answers, some invested heavily in strategic planning processes that gave iron clad guarantees that they could miraculously bring them back from the brink. And some of it worked, initially, but unfortunately failed in the end, and two high schools and 5 day schools closed shortly after.

We, on the other hand, simply focused on our core values of Christ-centered education, equipped called workers who were loyal to the church to keep up the good work, and simply did our duty. The cuts in staff were the most painful things I have ever had to witness, but with the loss of students we had no choice but to do our duty and let events belong to God.

And by the Grace of God, we saw how we were approved by +Him. We rolled the weight of *OUR* weak souls upon God's omnipotence and realized our actions, good or bad, were neither our sins nor our cross to bear!

It was God's.

Oh, what peace that affords, oh what comfort that gives, when you know God is in control and only assigns us what we know how to do! And even then, we will do it imperfectly, knowing God perfects it every time with mercy and grace.

Isaiah proclaims this undeniable truth to his flock in captivity in Babylon! To be sure the "We gotta do something" crowd was there too! We gotta eat, drink, work, and worship like the Chaldeans do! We got to speak their language too! It even affected our Holy Scriptures written in that time in the language of the vernacular of their captors. But the message of our duty was as clear then as it is today! Seek Yahweh in everything because He IS near to YOU!

Romans 10:13-15 reiterates this saying, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

He who walked in fellowship with Adam and Eve in the Garden before their rebellion to sin, walks with you!

He who came in the flesh to dwell among us, lived just like us, suffered all that suffers us, and died the death we all deserved to die; rising from the dead to abide where two or more are gathered in His name and live, individually in us, if we will let Him dwell there.

Call upon Him and prayer and praise every chance you get, because, as I said last week, He is the **ONLY** way, truth, and life!

And what we need to understand is for those who are far from Him...as our street sign said this week, "who moved?"

We moved in our unrighteousness and willful sinful actions. We chose the path that is wide and smooth that leads to destruction. We saw the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil and we picked it right off the branch and said “hmmm that tastes good!”

Oh, how our physical being revels in sin, because ultimately this sinful flesh will die with it, but our souls groan as in the pains of child birth knowing our sinful choices only lead us to Hell!

Thanks be to God that Isaiah proclaims the overwhelming abundance of grace without end. For God indeed has compassion on the sinner, so much so that He sends His Word through His prophets, that the Holy Spirit uses, to help us return to the Almighty and live in the peace and warmth of His love for the sinners who can never save themselves.

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 16:24, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”

But what you may not know is this was Jesus correcting Peter who rebuked Jesus for suggesting he would die for them. Peter felt he could control the events, and somehow managed to forget his actual duty. So, Jesus reckoned *his faith*, and took control of His path to the cross to save, not only Peter and the Disciples but everyone from their sins!

I know, It's hard. For Me TOO!

We want to know what God knows, we want control our lives and dictate to God, too! We want to tell everyone what to do, so we will be the center of their universe. So did Adam and Eve, so did Joseph's Brothers, so did Pharaoh, so did Nebuchadnezzar, so did Haman the Agagite, so did Antiochus Epiphanes, so did Herod the King, so did Judas Iscariot, and God told them and showed them and restricted them because their ways were not God's ways.

And when our ways are not God's way, He makes a way for us to see Him through the Cross that brings us back to Him. To do our duty because that event belonged to HIM.

AMEN

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