



Sunday
October 13th, 2024

Pentecost 21B

Towards Advent

Living the Talk:
Doing Good Out of
Love, Not Duty

Breaking Open the Word



St Peter's by the Lake
PAYNESVILLE
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



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READINGS

Amos 5.6-7, 10-15
Psalm 90.12-17
Hebrews 4.12-16
Mark 10.17-31



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Edal AntonLefterov

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jesus-Christ-from-Hagia-Sophia.jpg>

“

Jesus looked at him
and loved him.

”

Mark 10.21

O Almighty and most merciful God,
of thy bountiful goodness keep us,
we beseech thee,

from all things that may hurt us;
that we, being ready
both in body and soul,

may cheerfully accomplish
those things that thou wouldest
have done:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

This sermon focuses on the motivations behind doing good works, questioning whether they stem from obligation or a genuine love for God and others.

Using biblical readings from Amos, Psalm 90, Hebrews, and Mark, the message emphasises the need for a heart transformation rather than mere outward compliance.

The sermon highlights how the prophet Amos denounces empty rituals disconnected from justice, urging a pursuit of goodness that reflects God's desires. Similarly, the psalmist reminds us of the fleeting nature of life, encouraging works rooted in a wise, God-centered perspective.

The sermon further explores the accountability of our intentions, as seen in Hebrews, which stresses that God examines the heart, not just our actions. The story of the

rich young man in Mark is a compelling illustration, where Jesus challenges him to let go of worldly attachments in favour of a heart aligned with divine love.

In conclusion, the sermon calls for self-examination regarding our motives for good deeds, urging us to act from a place of love and authenticity rather than obligation.

Good works should manifest naturally from our relationship with God, portraying His love authentically in a world that needs it.

Key Reflection Points

1. Examine Your Motivations for Doing Good

Reflect on whether your good deeds stem from a sense of obligation or from a genuine love for God and others. Ask yourself if your actions are driven by an inner transformation or merely external compliance. How can you cultivate a deeper connection with God that inspires authentic service rather than duty-bound actions?

2. Align Your Heart with God's Justice and Mercy

Amos denounces empty rituals disconnected from justice. Consider how you can align your heart with God's desires for justice, mercy, and goodness in the world. In what ways can you seek to love good, as Amos urges, rather than simply perform good works out of obligation?

3. Detach from Worldly Attachments to Embrace Authentic Love

The story of the rich young man in Mark illustrates the challenge of letting go of worldly attachments. Reflect on what might be holding you back from fully aligning your heart with divine love. What are the things in your life that need to be surrendered so that your actions come from a place of love rather than duty? How can detaching from these attachments lead to greater freedom in loving and serving others authentically?

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



Good works are often seen as the currency of a righteous life. But why do we do good? Is it to fulfil a sense of duty, or is it because of a deep and abiding love for God and others? Today's readings challenge us to examine our motives, urging us to shift from a checklist of duties to a heart transformed by love.

The psalmist calls on God to "establish the work of our hands" (Psalm 90:17), not because we earn merit with God, but because our work becomes meaningful when aligned with God's purposes. Our good works naturally follow when we approach life with a heart of wisdom shaped by God's love.

The Prophetic Call to Justice:
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

The Power of God's Word and Our
Approach to Him:
Hebrews 4:12-16

The prophet Amos does not mince words when he condemns the people of Israel for their injustices. He calls out their exploitation of the poor and their empty religious practices. Amos's plea is not just for outward reform but for a transformation of the heart. He says, "Seek the Lord and live" (Amos 5:6). But what does it mean to seek the Lord? It's not about avoiding evil out of obligation but about actively doing good because it reflects the heart of God.

Hebrews powerfully reminds us of the nature of God's Word: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). It's not enough to do good on the surface if our hearts remain untouched. God sees beyond our actions to the motives behind them.

In the passage, we see that God despises empty rituals when they are disconnected from justice and mercy. Amos cries out, "Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts" (Amos 5:15). This isn't just a command to do good but to love good, to desire it as God desires it. The call is for a transformation of values, not just behaviour.

The writer of Hebrews also points us to Jesus, our High Priest, who sympathises with our weaknesses. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Jesus invites us to come as we are, with authenticity and simplicity, not out of pretence or obligation but out of the assurance that we are loved. It is this love that should inspire our good works.

Numbering Our Days:
Psalm 90:12-17

The Eye of the Needle:
Mark 10:17-31

Psalm 90 reminds us of the brevity of life: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). Life is fleeting, and the works we do should be rooted in this perspective. We are reminded that our time on earth is limited, but the works we do in love can have eternal significance.

In Mark 10, we encounter the rich young man who approaches Jesus with a question that cuts to the heart of our discussion today: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). Jesus lists the commandments, but the young man, confident in his righteousness, claims he has kept all of them since his youth. However, Jesus looks at him with



<https://www.teologiepentruazi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Domnul-si-tanarul-bogat.jpg>

love and says, "One thing you lack: Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mark 10:21).

Here, Jesus challenges the young man not merely to check off his moral duties but to give up the thing that keeps his heart tethered to the world. Jesus' famous hyperbole follows: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).

The point of this hyperbole is not about wealth itself but about attachment. The rich young man's wealth was not the issue—his unwillingness to let go of it. His goodness was based on duty, not love. Jesus is teaching that good works flow from a heart free from attachment, a heart that loves God above all.

Doing Good as Witness, Not Duty

What does this all mean for us? God is not asking us to be benefactors out of obligation. He isn't interested in us merely performing good deeds to check them off a list. He desires something deeper: authenticity. He wants us to witness His love with simplicity, showing through our lives what it means to love God and others.

In a world filled with injustice and need, our response should not be a cold obligation but a passionate desire to reflect the love of God. Our good works become a natural outflow of our love for Him. Just as Jesus invites the rich young man to follow Him, He invites us to do the same—not to earn God's favour, but because we already have it.

Our call is to witness this truth with a genuine heart. As Amos urges us, we are to love good, not just do good. As Hebrews reminds us, God knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, so we are free to come to Him just as we are. As Jesus teaches in Mark, it is not about wealth or work but the love and surrender behind them.

Conclusion

So today, let us examine our hearts. Are we doing good because we feel obligated or are so captivated by God's love that we can't help but share it? Let our actions be rooted in love, simplicity, and authenticity. May we live not as benefactors but as witnesses to the transforming power of God's love in our lives and the world.

1. The Nature of God's Love

Rationale: Emphasize that God's love is unconditional and persistent, even when we struggle with change. This point reassures the congregation that God's love remains steadfast, encouraging them to embrace their challenges without fear of rejection.

2. The Call to Change is Rooted in Love

Rationale: Highlight that God's call for change in our lives is motivated by His love for us. It is not punitive but rather a pathway to deeper fulfilment and purpose. This encourages the audience to view change as an opportunity for growth rather than a burden.

3. The Power of Transformation through Faith

Rationale: Discuss how faith in God empowers us to change and grow. This point reinforces the idea that all things are possible with God, inspiring hope and resilience in the face of difficulties.

4. The Importance of Community Support

Rationale: Encourage the congregation to support one another in their change journeys. This fosters a sense of belonging and accountability, reminding them they are not alone in their struggles.

5. Examining Our Motivations for Doing Good

Rationale: We should reflect on whether our actions stem from obligation or genuine love. This introspection can lead to a more authentic expression of faith and service, encouraging deeper connections with God and others.

6. Aligning Our Hearts with God's Justice and Mercy

Rationale: Challenge the congregation to move beyond empty rituals and engage in acts of justice and mercy. This aligns their actions with God's desires, fostering a more profound love for others.

7. Detaching from Worldly Attachments

Rationale: Encourage reflection on what worldly attachments may hinder authentic love. The congregation can experience greater freedom in their relationships and service by identifying and surrendering these attachments.

8. The Choice of Love vs. Condemnation

Rationale: Address whether we should condemn those who struggle with their sense of call. This point emphasises that love should be our guiding principle, encouraging compassion over judgment.

9. The Role of Grace in Our Journey

Rationale: Highlight the significance of grace in our lives as we navigate change. This point reassures the congregation that God's grace is sufficient for their shortcomings, fostering a spirit of humility and acceptance.

10. Encouragement to Persevere

Rationale: Conclude with a message of encouragement, reminding the congregation that perseverance in love and faith is essential. This reinforces the idea that while change may be challenging, it is also vital to their spiritual journey.

Conclusion

Rationale: Summarize the key points and reiterate that God does not give up on us, nor should we give up on ourselves or each other. Encourage the congregation to embrace God's love and the call to change as a journey of faith.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Question 1

What does it mean to ‘do good out of love’ instead of out of obligation or duty?

The sermon emphasises the importance of our motives behind good deeds, suggesting that love should be the driving force rather than a sense of duty.

Can you think of a time when you did something kind for someone? Was it motivated by love or obligation?

Question 2

How can we shift our mindset from performing good deeds as a checklist to doing them from a transformed heart?

Pastor reflects on how our actions should stem from a heart that desires to love and serve rather than just fulfilling duties.

What steps can you take daily to ensure your actions are rooted in love?

Question 3

Amos 5:15 says, ‘Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.’ How does this verse challenge you to reflect on your actions or beliefs?

The sermon discusses Amos’ call to transform from merely knowing what is pleasing to loving and desiring what is good.

What specific actions can you take to align yourself more with the principles of justice and goodness in your community?

Question 4

Why do you think Jesus challenged the rich young man to sell his possessions instead of telling him to follow the rules?



The sermon points out that Jesus wanted to address the young man's attachment to material goods and encourage a more profound love for God and others.

How might your attachments, whether to things or habits, prevent you from fully following your values or beliefs?

Question 5

What does it mean to witness God's love in your actions, and how can it be different from just doing good deeds?

The sermon encourages us to see good works not as obligations but as natural expressions of God's love.

How can you incorporate witnessing God's love in your everyday interactions with friends, family, or classmates?

End notes and further reading

Andrew's Version

Andrew McGowan: <https://substack.com/home/post/p-149844639>

Sacra Pagina

[VOLUME 2: THE GOSPEL OF MARK,](#)

[Donahue, Harrington SJ Liturgicql Press, 2002](#)



Brabarlung Totem
This is produced on
Gunaikurnai Land, and our
respects are paid to the First
Nations people everywhere.



Walking the Talk

5 Day Devotional

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the transformative power of love in our good works and the deeper motivations behind our actions as we reflect on God's Word.

Day 1 Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Good works are often seen as the currency of a righteous life, but we must ask ourselves why we do good. Is it merely to fulfil a sense of duty, or is it rooted in a love for God and others? The prophet Amos calls us to seek the Lord genuinely, urging us to move beyond empty rituals and develop a heart transformed by love. God yearns for us to love good and desire justice as He does, reflecting His character through our lives. Let's take a moment to reflect on our motivations. Are our actions an outflow of genuine love for God or just checkboxes on a to-do list? This week, consider what it means to have a transformed heart that seeks justice and mercy, naturally allowing our good works to desire God's purposes.

Reflection Questions:

- What motivates you to do good work?
- Are you more focused on metrics of goodness or the sincerity of your love?
- How can you shift from obligation to heartfelt service?
- Prayer Prompts:
- Ask God to reveal any areas where you may strive out of obligation.
- Pray for a more profound understanding and experience of His love.

Day 2 Psalm 90:12-17

Psalm 90 poses a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of life: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." When we grasp the brevity of life, it shifts our perspective on our good works. Authentic actions rooted in love can hold eternal significance. This emphasises that our days are limited; thus, our good works should be aligned with God's eternal purposes. The psalmist calls for God to establish the work of our hands so it may not be in vain. When we approach life with a heart of wisdom shaped by God's love, our actions reflect His grace in the world. Let this day be a moment to assess how you align your efforts with His will and how these can echo into eternity.

Reflection Questions:

- How often do you reflect on the brevity of life?
- What are the works you want God to establish in your life?
- Are your daily actions reflecting an eternal perspective?
- Prayer Prompts:
- Pray for wisdom in how you spend your days and your work.
- Ask God to help you focus on what truly matters in His Kingdom.

Day 3 Hebrews 4:12-16

The text in Hebrews reminds us that "the word of God is alive and active," piercing through our hearts and revealing our inner motives. It isn't sufficient to perform good deeds while neglecting the state of our hearts. God sees beyond our actions; He seeks the intentions behind them. This truth emphasises the need for authenticity in our good works. As we read about Jesus, our High Priest, we are invited to approach God's grace, acknowledging our weaknesses confidently. Our good works should not arise from a place of pretence but from an honest and loving relationship with Him. This openness transforms our hearts, leading to good works as a natural expression of His love in our lives.

Reflection Questions:

- Are your actions reflective of a genuine relationship with God?
- How do you allow God's Word to shape your heart and intentions?
- What do you think God sees when He looks at your heart?
- Prayer Prompts:
- Pray for a deeper understanding of your heart's intentions.
- Ask for courage to approach God authentically with your weaknesses.

Day 4 Mark 10:17-31

In Mark, the rich young man approaches Jesus, seeking the secret to eternal life. Jesus challenges him to follow a checklist of commandments and surrender his attachment to wealth. This interaction illustrates that our good works must stem from love rather than obligation or attachment. When we cling to worldly things, we may struggle to embrace our call to love God above all fully. The hyperbole of the camel passing through the eye of a needle is a stark reminder: it's not the possession of wealth that is problematic but the heart's attachment to it. Jesus invites us to freedom—good works that radiate from a heart that loves God more than anything else. Today, contemplate what attachments in your life may hinder your ability to follow Him.

Reflection Questions:

- What earthly attachments might be influencing your relationship with God?
- How do you define true freedom in your walk with Jesus?
- How can you detach from those things and lean into God's love?
- Prayer Prompts:
- Pray for freedom from any unhealthy attachments in your life.
- Ask God to show you what it means to love Him above all else.

Day 5 John 13:34-35

As we conclude this devotional, let us remember that our mission is not to act out of obligation but to witness God's love through our lives. Jesus commands us to "love one another" as He has loved us. This is not merely a call to do good but to embody goodness that flows from an authentic relationship with Him. Our good works must spring from an earnest desire to mirror God's love in a challenging world. Let us examine our hearts: does God's love compel us, or are we functioning from a checklist mentality? As we move forward, let our lives shine as witnesses to His transformative power, demonstrating love, simplicity, and authenticity.

Reflection Questions:

- How can you better embody God's love in your daily actions?
- In what areas of your life do you feel you are acting out of obligation?
- What steps can you take to become a more authentic witness of His love?
- Prayer Prompts:
- Pray for guidance on how to serve others from a place of true love.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you act authentically in all your relationships.

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