



It seems like we are trying to fit in quite a bit of churchiness today, and yet, it's as if they all play a rather vital role in how we pull off this whole church thing. For starters, it only makes sense that with a new year of ministry should come what Christians have long called Rally Day as the beginning to Sunday school classes. Because as much as organized religion is doing everything it can to ensure the inclusion of

youth in worship and service activities and other parts of our ministry operation, there is still something to be said for their own place in the building where they can come together and further learn about a story that is just as much for them as it is for the more advanced in years. That they may be told in no uncertain terms that the God of all of this, is the God for them, too.

But then we're trying to throw in this whole God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday thing again: an idea started by our mother church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America just over 10 years ago, to encourage its thousands of congregations to take the Sunday after Labor Day weekend to intentionally commit time and resources to serving their local communities or well, well beyond. Now, for some onlookers, it may seem like basic lip service: to wear the yellow t-shirts sporting our wider church's motto on the front and advertising our congregation on the back. But there's this rather humbling and holy connection made today that we often do not think about in our standard church operation nowadays. Because on this God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday, we will, in a sense, serve alongside thousands of other ELCA congregations, some of whom are struggling far beyond what you could ever imagine: no Sunday school to speak of for years, no children whatsoever in the pews, no pastor serving there for what seems like ages, fearful that they may not be able to keep their doors open much longer; and yet, for so many in those bleakest circumstances, more than you could ever imagine will still take time and resources today to join in this holy movement as if God can still work through their tried and true hands, too. It's as if they're still under the impression that putting their faith into action is as vital of a role in doing this whole church thing no matter how much their budget has changed.

And if that isn't enough, we're trying to throw in this whole Make a Difference thing as well. Yes, the clever comeback would be, does it really "make a difference" what we call today? But for some, it just might. Because we know there are people out there who don't know where to turn right now. There are children of God who aren't so sure who to trust anymore. They seem to be flooded with news of doom and gloom and evil and hatred, a perfect combination for cynicism to run absolutely rampant in the depths of their soul. But deep down, they want to be a part of something different. They're longing for hope and grace and compassion and love, as if there can somehow still be some goodness in this world. Maybe they don't know it as the Gospel yet. Maybe they don't know that in that Gospel is not only a difference made in them, but that they can be part of a difference made in the world.

Maybe they don't know about places like Divinity, who insist that yes, goodness can be found in Bible pages and on altar tables and through choral and Sunday school teacher voices, but that there still is goodness in the streets surrounding us and all around the world. Maybe they don't know about groups like Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry who will not turn people away who have fallen on the absolute worst of times in their lives, and instead, give them shelter and hope along with it. Maybe they don't know about the Redeemer Crisis Center who will ensure that families, including of youngest of children, will not suffer from hunger, and along with that

food comes compassion. Maybe they don't know about a God not of judgment or guilt or shame or manipulation or inciting the worst fear. Maybe they don't know about a God of hope and grace and compassion and love. Maybe they don't know about the God who unleashed the holiest of difference made in Jesus Christ on the world. And that through him the difference was made that humanity did not have to pull off perfect churchiness or individual living to earn acceptance from the Divine, but that it would be given without any strings attached to children of God all over the world.

It is that Greatest News of the Gospel that we feel must be shared to the youngest of life in Sunday school rooms and in any way we can reach them. It is that Gospel that empowers us to not only worship in pews, but to put in action in fellowship halls and beyond throughout our wider church this day, and many many other days in our ministry operation. It is that Gospel that has us convinced that all children of God have more than enough Holy Spirit to work with in them to make a difference in this world that God still so loves. It is that Gospel that has us believing that Christ made all the difference long ago and still is today. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!