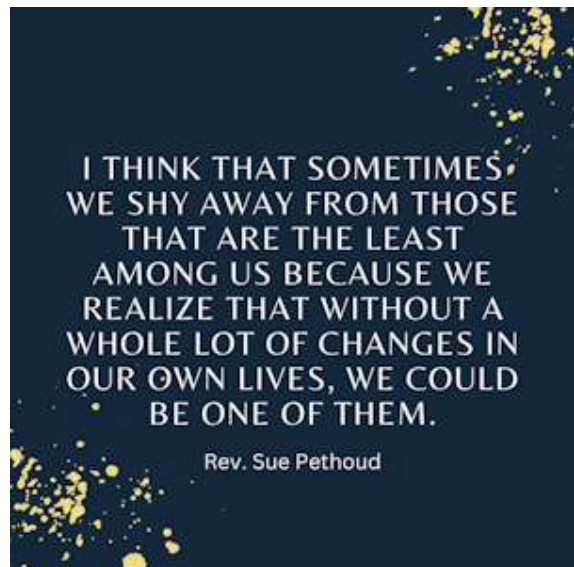


The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their
flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman



I posted this on my Facebook page on Christmas Day. It wasn't the first time I'd done that. It currently has 27 reactions, 2 shares and 2 comments and it's really what it's all about.

I'm a life-long, church going Christian. I've listened to thousands of sermons and read from the Bible regularly for years though it wasn't until sometime around the year 2000 that I really understood what faith in Christ was all about. This piece and the parable of the sheep and the goats from Matthew 25 tell it all.

Not until I studied the parable with the youth of my own church did I really grasp the enormity of its teaching. I got it that we as Christians were to take care of the poor but I don't think I really understood what that meant. Maybe it was because we really delved into the meaning of what the passage was teaching us, maybe it was because we actually took on the role of homeless persons for a really long, cold night, maybe it was because we actually fed hungry people. Maybe it was because we had spent part of our summer in Appalachia doing home repair. I'm not sure, but studying Matthew 25 with those young people gave me a whole new understanding of what was expected of me and therefore from all of us.

Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. House the homeless. Clothe the

naked. Visit the sick and the imprisoned. None of that is hard but we avoid it. We send our money to charities where we hope that someone else will take care of the problem. We put a few cans of food in the mailbox when the letter carriers have their annual collection and we feel that we have fed the hungry. That's not what Jesus meant!

Sure, our money helps and that food in the mailbox helps but that's not enough! WE need to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless and visit those that are alone. It's all part of the love your neighbor thing that Jesus calls us all to do.

I think that sometimes we shy away from those that are the least among us because we realize that without a whole lot of changes in our own lives, we could be one of them. Especially in tough economic times, one bad decision or one lost paycheck could put any of us in their place and that scares us. That's why ministry WITH the poor, the least among us, rather than ministry TO the poor is so important. We need to realize that they are not so different from ourselves. Their circumstances may be a bit different but they themselves are not

That's what being in mission is all about. Find a local non-profit that feeds the hungry or houses the homeless. Find out how they incorporate volunteers in their program. Organize a group from your church to actually leave your comfort zone and be in ministry with the least among us, our neighbors.

- Rev. Sue Pethoud, Cass Community Social Services