

Trinity United Methodist Church Iron Mountain, Michigan
September 23, 2018 Rev. Geri Hamlen 10:30 Worship

Our focus during this Jubilee year, is looking and listening for God's direction, here in this Trinity church. During September, we are expanding our imagination to include visions of how God wants us to be the Church together with each other. I read recently—I can't find the magazine and author but it went something along the lines of: *It's hard for us to figure out what God wants of us sometimes, but it's real clear what we're not supposed to do. We are not supposed to forget about Jesus. We're not supposed to go all day without thanking God or asking God for help.* And yet, we get so busy, thinking we have to do so much...God knows that about us and that is why God gave us the Sabbath. A day of rest. Of playfulness and imagination. Sabbath is our chance to remember the bigger project that God intends for all of us. A chance to breath in peace and comfort and strength. Hear these words of Jesus who tries to explain the purpose of Sabbath to the Religious leaders of his day.

Gospel Reading Mark 2: 23 - 28 (The Message)

One Sabbath day Jesus was walking through a field of ripe grain.
As his disciples made a path, they pulled off heads of grain.

The Pharisees told on them to Jesus:

“Look, your disciples are breaking Sabbath rules!”

Jesus said,

“Really? Haven't you ever read what David did when he was hungry,
along with those who were with him?

How he entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar,
with the Chief Priest Abiathar right there watching—
holy bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat—
and handed it out to his companions?”

Then Jesus said,

“The Sabbath was made to serve us;
we weren't made to serve the Sabbath.

The Son of Man is no servant to the Sabbath. He's in charge of it!”
The words of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God

Jesus wants us to know that we are precious in God's eyes and that being the people of God is more important than doing what the world tells us is important. Hear how Paul opens our imaginations in his letter to the Romans.

Reading from the Letters Romans 12: 1 – 3 (The Message)

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you:

Take your everyday, ordinary life—
your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—
and place it before God as an offering...

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.
Instead, fix your attention on God.

You'll be changed from the inside out.

Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it.

Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity,
God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me,
and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you.
Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace,
it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are
bringing this goodness to God.

No, God brings it all to you.

The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us,
not by what we are and what we do for him.'

The words of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God

The Message

'Holy Irresponsible'

Pastor Geri

You have possibly heard me talk about how I am one of 5 children. The middle child actually. And as we got older, my parents started taking a chance on leaving us alone, with my older sisters, the twins, acting as babysitters. We each had a list of chores that we were responsible for getting done. I remember one time, I was deeply engaged in reading a book...like I often was back then. Probably *Gone with the Wind* or some epic novel of the time. And I did NOT do my list. My sisters yelled at me but I ignored them and did what I wanted, instead of doing what I was supposed to do. And boy did I get it.

To this day I can still hear bits and pieces of the lecture: ***You, young lady, are wholly irresponsible. And don't try to blame your sisters or make excuses. We trusted you...no, my parents didn't use the Disappointment card. You know the one that goes, 'I'm so disappointed in you...' I didn't hear that but what I did hear was...We trusted you and now we don't. And once you lose trust it takes a long time to earn it back. So from now on...and there was a whole new list of chores that I had to do to earn back that trust I had lost because I had failed to be Wholly Responsible for my part.***

Not **Holy**...like up on the screen but **Wholly** as in fully, totally, completely irresponsible. Sigh.

Those childhood lessons...different for all of us but they all lean towards this idea that we have to be responsible. We have to finish a set list of tasks before we go to bed. We have to get our homework done and turned in on time in order to get good grades and to get into college so we can get a good job and do more and more and more to get more and more and more. Important lessons but...carried to an extreme, that sense of being responsible, wholly responsible for everything can become a problem. We just might become...and You've probably heard this before: Human Doings, rather than Human beings. And our prayers, if we make time to pray are mostly to ask for more energy, more strength, more hopefulness that someday it will all be done and we can rest. Because we feel **wholly responsible**...and it wears us out.

Unfortunately, even the Church conveys this message of being responsible and getting stuff done. Especially during this season leading up to Charge Conference. The Nominating Committee keeps asking people to sign onto committees...sometimes that's a 3 year commitment and obviously Committees have functions and tasks that need to be done. And we start to think that in order to be a good Christian...we need to be a doer of many things. And to do them well. And often.

With that kind of thinking, Christian sacrifice...instead of referring back to the sacrifice of love that Jesus made for us on the cross...no Christian sacrifice becomes a matter of martyrdom. Of doing what's expected of us even when we're too tired, or too sad, or we just plain don't want to anymore. That's the kind of martyrdom that leads to crabbiness. Irritability...unhappiness and yes, that sense of I might as well do it myself because I just don't have the energy to teach someone else or put up with them doing it wrong. Can any of you relate to that? Just blink three times—Yes that's me---so no one sees you!

But let me ask you this...Do you think that's what Jesus imagined for his followers and his church? Tired. Crabby. Worn out? Not according to our Holy teachings...Jesus reminds us that we are children of God. Precious children of God. And Jesus tells us not to forget that the Sabbath is made for the people...not the other way around. The Sabbath is meant to give us the space, breathing room to reflect and imagine what God is hoping for. Sabbath is any time during the day or the week when we offer God our time and our attention so that God can work within and through us...so that we can understand who we are and how God intends for us to be...

And only then, when we know ourselves as God knows us, can we figure out what to **do** in the name of Jesus.

Paul says:

*The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by
what **God is** and by what **God does for us**,
not by what we are and what we do for God.'*

Let's use our imaginations at this point to think about what it would be like to focus on God as we give up on being '**Wholly Responsible**' for everything in our lives and in our church and imagine what would it be like to be '**Holy Irresponsible**' for **God** instead. Paul gives some very specific suggestions on this when he says:

So here's what I want you to do, with God helping you:

*Take your everyday, ordinary life—
your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—
and place it before God as an offering...*

We tend to think of our offerings in terms of these Offering plates and collecting what's necessary for the bills of the church. We think of Giving Goal campaigns (which will be coming up in October) and special offerings like 'Turn up the Heat.' Basically, when the subject of offerings comes up ... we think of **money**.

So much so that we forget: God made us to be people...with time and talents and the ability to pray and the words to talk to each other and our neighbors. These are the every day, ordinary gifts that Paul is tells us to offer to God through the church. Everything we think and feel and say can be a gift to God if we remember to offer it that way. If we pause in the middle of what we're doing and say...this one's for you God. Your gift, your offering.

The Finance Committee and the Stewardship Team might be shaking their heads when I say this next thing but I'll be brave: Would it be **Holy Irresponsible (Holy like up on the screen)** if we quit insisting that you grow in your financial generosity? What if, instead, we just offer our whole lives to God?

Can you imagine us, sitting back and trusting each other to be as generous as we can be...And then living within the limits of what we are given. How does that sound for being **'Holy Irresponsible?'** **Trusting God. Trusting each other.**

Paul says: *Instead, fix your attention on God.*

You'll be changed from the inside out.

Somewhere along the way, many of us got the idea that we are supposed to fix our attention on keeping the missions and the Sunday School and the activities of the church going the way they are right now. Would it be **'Holy Irresponsible'** if we stopped working so hard to keep everything the way it's always been? Can you imagine what might happen if we take our eyes off the image of 'How it's supposed to be?' And allow God to change us from the inside out?

You know, God may have another plan for us. Of course, God may have been perfectly happy with how we have done church for **all of these many years** but when we fix our attention, our imagination on God **today**...there just might be something new and different that happens inside of us. A seed that God will plant. The germ of an idea. A postage stamp of a picture of where God is leading and how we can get there. Is it possible that we are being **'Holy Irresponsible'** in a good sort of way when we day-dream about newness and doing things differently? What might God choose to do for and with us?

Paul says, challenges the readers of Romans: *Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it.*

Aren't we being **'Holy Irresponsible'** in a good sort of way in this Jubilee Year by suspending our mission statement here at Trinity and concentrating on Prayer and Reading the Bible and looking at our past? I say yes. We have let go of some of our 'duties and doings' this year—which may seem irresponsible but the **Holy** part is that We are learning through this Jubilee Year how to readily recognize what God wants from us as a church.

Some of you have said to me...this church is fine just the way it is. So why would God want us to do anything different? All I can tell you is that God is a living, breathing, creative power in the world. God's **love** is steadfast and endures forever but God's world has been designed for endless cycles of growth, maturity, harvest, rest, even death and then re-birth.

One Church philosopher said: 'When the energy of a congregation is entirely used up, or is even insufficient for maintaining the current status quo...and there's nothing left over for something new to happen. You're in a shrinking, down-hill mode. Take a break and let the God of all newness inspire you.' That's what we're doing here. Being **'Holy Irresponsible'** in order to be ready to recognize and respond to God's loving direction.

Maybe some of you already have felt the touch and the call of God for this Trinity UMC. Do you have any ideas floating around in your mind? I am eager to hear...please feel free to write it down with your name so we can get together and talk.

Some of you have told me this is taking a long time. How long does it take to figure out what God wants? It takes as long as it takes. Just remember a thousand years are like a day in the eyes of the Lord. We can do this!

Paul tells us:

Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace,

*it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No...**God brings it all to you.***

In our human transactions, we want balance. If someone buys you a gift...you want to give them a gift in return. Or at least a thank you note. It feels irresponsible not to acknowledge and reciprocate. But hear the good news: It is **'Holy Irresponsible' again**, in a good sort of way...for us to let God give us so much more than we deserve.

Why would we even think that we could ever offer God as much as God has already given us? Consider the mistakes that we make sometimes. The sins we commit occasionally. The unkindness we display at times. The stinginess we insist on as it suits us. It's OK. Because God insists on bringing us more goodness and grace and mercy and love. Whether we want it or not! Whether we did anything to deserve it or not. Imagine that!

The tough thing is that, we don't always want the goodness God has to offer do we? For example...God is offering to us an opportunity next week-end to find healing, reconciliation and relief from emotional pain. Right here at Church. Yes, you've probably seen it mentioned so many times that it's become background noise that is easy to ignore but let me draw your attention to a Gift from God through our Michigan Conference of the UMC. Only 3 people that I know of have said they are coming.

Do we want to accept this gift?

Do we want to be healed of our hurt feelings and unhappiness?

Do we want to be changed from the inside out?

Do we believe that God can do all of that!

Can we believe that God wants that freedom and openness and new life for each and every single one of us? And for our church? Especially for our church which can do so much for so many.

I believe it. I can even imagine it...all of you who love this church.

All of you who can imagine a glorious future for Trinity.

All of you who want to be unburdened of an unpleasant past.

God has the gift in hand...it's coming next week-end and you are all invited!

Dare to be Holy Irresponsible and Come. Just come...To be blessed, To be changed from the inside out. Imagine what a glorious day that will be! Amen.