

“U.P. (#3): SHARING & SERVING”

(James 2:14-19)

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[PROPS NEEDED: Can of Lindsay Black Olives; White Napkin]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 10-13-24]

--I--

1. Read CEB Text: James 2:14-19 and Pray
2. I have here a can of "*Lindsay, Ripe, Pitted, Medium Black Olives*" -- to many people, these are cold, wet, salty, slimy, and (in the words of my wife) altogether disgusting!

A--But to our daughter Jennifer, they are a delicacy beyond compare -- a treasure that has absolutely no equal!

B--From a very young age, she could sit & eat a whole can of these at one time (even when it made her sick!), and she loved to have them at as many meals as possible.

1--I remember one particular occasion which was her first day of 3-year preschool, she insisted that we pack a little container of black olives for her lunch.

2--And at the end of the day when we picked her up from that first day of school, we asked how her day went, and instead of replying, she had a sad, dejected look on her face.

3--We immediately thought, "Oh, no! Something really bad happened." So we asked again, "Darling, what happened at school today to make you so sad?"

4--And with a voice that sounded like her little heart had been broken, she replied, "No one wanted to share my black olives with me!"

C--Jennifer (who's now 31) gave me permission to tell you that story, and whether or not she realized it at the time, she actually stumbled onto a basic truth of life: when you possess a treasure (something vitally important to you), it's natural to want to share it with others.

3. Well, in today's sermon, we're continuing our stewardship series called "U.P." in which we're talking about specific ways that you and I can "*Unleash*" our "*Potential*" (U.P.) and become the people God calls us to be as we travel the journey called life.
4. And what we find both in today's scripture from James 2 and in other Bible scriptures is the importance of doing two things that help us to share our faith with others.

--II--

5. The first is what we sometimes call "***Faith-SHARING***" (or "*witnessing*"), and it actually refers to nothing more than our willingness to *verbally* share with others the message of hope that *we've* found in Jesus Christ.¹

A--In Mark 16:15 Jesus tells his followers are to "*Go into all the world and announce the good news...*", while Romans 10:15 proclaims, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who share good news.*", and 1 Peter 3:15 says that "*Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. Yet do this with respectful humility....*"

1--In other words, part of what it means to be a Christian is that we *share* the stories & experiences of our faith with others -- our friends, relatives, work-mates, acquaintances, and neighbors -- rather than keeping them to ourselves.

2--Yet, notice the "*respectful humility*" we're to have when we do it -- we're not to go around beating people over the head w/the Bible, or judging them for some lifestyle we don't agree with, or threatening them with hell if they don't listen.

3--No. Our job is simply to *share* faith, and let the Holy Spirit do the rest!

B--My point here is that you and I *Unleash* our *Potential* partly by how (and how well) we *share* the faith we have in Christ with others.

1--We share in this way when we post a story on social media about how our faith has helped us through a tough time.

2--We do it when we tell someone at work about the difference our faith has made in our relationships with family and friends.

3--We do it when we go out of our way to say hello and perhaps even interact with someone who is different than us in some way, perhaps in terms of their skin color, their nationality, politics, the way they dress, or the kind of car they drive.

4--And I would suggest that we even do it when we participate in and help with various Outreach ministries/events of our church (like our annual Autumn Acres community festival coming up Nov. 16; if you're interested in helping, please email the church office).

C--*However* we do it, though, the point is that we can *unleash* our *potential* partly through the way(s) that you and I verbally share our faith with others.

6. But remember I said that there are TWO biblical ways to share Christ, and this second approach involves sharing our faith through our *actions* and *deeds* -- what we often call "***FAITH-SERVING / SERVICE***" -- or "Missions" (plural; which, by the way, is *not* the same as our Church's "*Mission*", singular).²

A--We find this form of sharing articulated well in *today's* scripture from James 2, where it's clear that the people were very good at *verbally* sharing their faith with others.

B--But the problem was that they were doing *that* (verbal SHARING) to the *exclusion* of helping and SERVING others. Let me read several verses again...

1--Verses 14-17, "*Brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.*"³

2--James is saying, in other words, that sharing Christ doesn't *only* involve what we *say* but also what we *do* -- it's not *either/or*, but *both/and*.⁴

3--And just as we as a church can't have *Sharing* ministries without *Serving* ministries (and vice versa), so you and I as individuals shouldn't think we can share our faith *verbally* without also *doing* our faith (and vice versa)!⁵

C--Francis of Assisi allegedly once said, "*Preach Christ at all times. Use words if necessary*" -- he was talking about the importance of sharing Christ through faith-filled acts of service.

1--We do this when we volunteer to help at our church's Eastgate Community missions events, or serving the hungry at Trinity Table (like the team going today), or packing meals for this through our "packing parties" after worship.

2--We do it when we adopt a needy child through Compassion International, or give to missions ministries like Wellroot Family Services, Wesley Woods for senior adults, or One-Roof Ministries here in Newnan.

3--We share Christ through in this way when we help needy children each holiday season by preparing an "Operation Christmas Child" shoebox, or adopt a needy child or senior through our "Angel Tree" ministry, or collect food for needy local families through our annual "Advent Blessing Box" ministry.

4--When do it when we serve on a mission trip to El Salvador (like we'll be doing June 2025), or donate to victims of natural disasters (like Hurricanes Helene or Milton).

5--We do it when we visit homebound members through our church's "We Care" ministry, or help support grieving persons through our "GriefShare" ministry.

6--Of course, these aren't the *only* ways to serve others, but they at least are a few ways our church provides for each of us to unleash our potential in this way.

7. As we wrap up, though, let me share one final metaphor to help remember how we can *Unleash Potential* by GOING into the world to share Christ by serving others.

A--I have here a napkin, which represents two ways of thinking of the church/Christianity:

1--There's a lot of people (including a lot of church folks) who think being in a church is like this: [TUCK NAPKIN UNDER CHIN AS A BIB] ... "*I'm here. Now feed me! The church exists to meet MY needs, and if you're not doing that, I'm outta' here. I'll go to another church down the road that IS!*" (And we sometimes do this with God, too, mirroring the consumer-driven culture of today's world)

2--But here's how today's scripture teaches us to understand this:

[TAKE NAPKIN, KNEEL & PLACE IT OVER ARM LIKE A WAITER]... "*How may I serve you. We're not at church to get OUR needs met, but to find out how we together can help meet the needs of OTHERS.*" (= a serving VS consumer culture)

B--Have you ever noticed that the first two letters of the word God spell ")GO", but that the first three letters of the word Satan are "SAT"? So are you a "Go-er" or a "Sat-ter"?

C--You see, if we're on *God's* side -- if we're to *Unleash* our full *Potential* as followers of Jesus Christ -- then our faith doesn't call us to idly sit by and cheer others on from the comfort of the sidelines.

D--Instead, we're called to *BE* the "*hands & feet of Jesus*" to others ("*Jesus with skin on*", if you will) -- to be about going out *into the world to share Jesus* so that others can experience him both through what we *say* AND through what we *do!*

8. [PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ In other words, it's a wonderful, beautiful thing when God's people get out of their church building go out into the world to share Jesus with those around them.

² The former is just a *piece* of the latter.

³ Note that Verse 18 sounds like a diatribe against those who practice "multiple choice generosity" (i.e., the idea that we need to be generous with either our money *or* be generous with our actions of love service to and with others -- that it's a "either/or" choice, rather than a "both/and" responsibility! In the words of a popular Ford commercial from the past, "And is better..." (Not "sweet OR sour chicken"; not "bed OR breakfast").

Furthermore, Verse 19 says that even the demons of the spiritual world believe in and have faith in God (that god is one). But what makes a true Christian different is the way they put their faith into practice not only through their actions of faith -- that is: the giving of their finances (last week) and also the sharing of their faith through acts of service and hospitality.

⁴ Biblical Christianity requires us BOTH to *do* good works, AND to *share* our faith. This is why the concept of "saving souls" as the "one and only purpose" of the Christian church is a flawed and essentially incorrect understanding. "Saving souls" (or "evangelism") is merely part of this overarching process of what today's scripture calls "making disciples" that also includes the taking care of people's physical needs.

Notice, too, that these two tasks are reflected in the final two promises we make as United Methodist Christians: "*Service*" and "*Witness*" -- meaning that as we fulfill our vows to God through our church, we're actually "*serving and sharing Jesus*."

⁵ If you remember the popular catch-phrase a number of years back, "WWJD"? ("*What Would Jesus Do?*"), you know that it means that, as Christians and as a church, we're called to look at what Jesus did and to emulate those things in our own lives and actions. So what *did* he do? Jesus fed the hungry, clothed the naked, helped the poor, healed the sick, and challenged the status quo where there was injustice. Well, we're called to do no less, whether it be through our own *personal* actions and behaviors, or through the *corporate* actions and activities (the "ministries") of our church.