

## Response-ability

When John F Kennedy was inaugurated as US President in January of 1961, he famously challenged Americans saying, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Less than two months later, he established one way for Americans to do just that when he signed an order setting up the Peace Corps.

JFK’s idea was to get thousands of people who were not professional diplomats, not career adventurers, but just ordinary people with particular skill sets (agriculture, engineering, teaching, etc.) to fan out into the world to help people. To date volunteers serve in more than 60 countries, side by side with local community members building relationships, exchanging cultures, and knowledge and helping transform lives for generations.

We can explore how our response to Kennedy’s challenge can reflect our call to serve God. In what sense can our personal mission as a Christian today be described as volunteering in the Peace Corp of God? In what way is our home, workplace, or community making a difference everyday with innovation, creativity, and compassion?

Today’s Epistle reading is from Paul’s letter to the Christians at Philippi. Of all the churches that sprang up as a result of the ministry of Paul, probably none was closer to his heart than the church at Philippi. He visited the town at least three times; and, in return, the Philippian Christians were true friends to Paul. He is in jail as he writes this letter acknowledging the gift care package the church sent to help him be more comfortable. Now it’s easy to understand why Paul opens his letter , “I thank my God every time I remember you.”

In addition to thanking the church, Paul addresses a disagreement between two women in the Philippian church, Eudodia and Syntyche, urging them to “be of the same mind in the Lord.” He

goes on to ask the church members to assist these women in coming together. In the same sentence, he compliments both women; “they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.” There is no suggestion in the Bible that the church had an ongoing problem with these two women; so, in all probability, the congregation helped them to find fellowship with one another again.

In what ways do you personally take responsibility for the general atmosphere of your church and not leave it to the pastor to sort out differences between members? Think back to last year when our church had to be without a regular pastor for several months, but did have a pulpit supply pastor each Sunday from various places. What abilities, attitudes and personal faith commitments are present among the members that enabled you to carry on as an active and vital church in the meantime? When it comes to helping the church function, most laypeople don’t think of themselves as professionals. But the word “amateur” comes from a Latin verb “amare” which means “to love.” How does that definition help you to understand your role in the church?

In this passage we read how Paul tells his readers to rejoice in the Lord, to pray with both supplications (requests) and words of thanks, and then, to let their minds dwell on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable . . . and . . . anything worthy of praise.” Then at the end of the list, he adds “think about these things”

If we were to stop reading Paul’s letter right there, we might conclude that all he was attempting to do was to give his readers something to think about, but Paul doesn’t stop there. He adds, “Keep on doing the[se] things.” Paul was telling them to fill their minds with

virtuous concepts and went on to tell them they should express their ideals in actions.

Philippians started out as a letter but became a part of Scripture because Paul didn't leave his audience wondering what they were to do with what he was talking about. They were to live lives that were true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and worthy of praise.

What efforts do you make to think on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and worthy of praise? In what way is your workplace, home, or community a place where you can make a difference every day with the qualities Paul named in the lesson today? How is that like serving in the Peace Corp of God? Where, besides at church, have you been able to put your Christian values into specific action?

One pastor tells of a Laity Sunday when he and a laywoman shared the sermon. In his portion, the pastor spoke about the responsibility of the pastor to prayerfully and carefully listen for God's word in the Scripture for the day and then to do his/her best to bring that message in an understandable way to the congregation. In her portion, which she composed separately from the pastor, the laywoman said that worshippers have a responsibility to take care of their "response ability." In other words, the preacher has a responsibility to prepare adequately for the service, but the attendees have a responsibility to come ready to take it in and then go out and put what they 've learned into practice.

When have you made specific changes in your behavior or undertaken a new task expressly because of something you heard in worship? In what other ways do you hear God speak to you? How do you rate your "response ability?" Why?

Jesus shared in the gospel lesson today that God issued an invitation. It's an invitation that anyone with any sense of importance would want to receive. It's an invitation to a banquet with the KING – a wedding banquet – the KING is marrying his BRIDE -the church. Paul has given us a way to be ready for the invitation when it arrives. He wants us to prepare ahead of time so we won't be caught short. The parable tells us many people ignore the invitation and throw it in file 13 and quickly forget about it. Then God will go out and invite others – people we may not have thought would be on the list.

Does it really matter who else is on the list? Isn't the most important thing that WE are on the list? Our challenge today is to go forth and work on our RESPONSE-ABILITY

The invitation has been sent—will we respond? – will we enjoy the abundance God is giving us? God is waiting.

Praise be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

- 1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying:
- 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.
- 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.
- 4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’
- 5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.
- 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.
- 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.
- 8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.
- 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’
- 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.
- 11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.
- 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.
- 13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
- 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

**Our second reading is taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 4: verses 1-9, found in the Pew Bible on pages 1829-30.**

- 1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**
- 2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.**
- 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.**
- 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**
- 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.**
- 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**
- 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**
- 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.**
- 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

**Let us pray.**

**Jesus, you often taught in parables. You used stories to help your listeners understand deeper truths. As we look at one of your parables today, give us eyes to see the truth you are showing us, ears to hear it well, and hearts that are ready and willing to respond in obedience. Thank you for giving us your words. May they leave a lasting imprint on our hearts and minds today. Amen.**

**Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 25: verses 1-9, found in your Pew Bible on pages 1095-96, if you would like to follow along.**

- 1 LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.**
- 2 You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.**
- 3 Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.**
- 4 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall**
- 5 and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.**
- 6 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.**
- 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;**
- 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.**
- 9 In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."**