



**Works of Mercy**  
**Reverend Keith Nelson**  
**Lenten Message**  
**Sakakawea District Superintendent**

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Hello, I'm Keith Nelson, District Superintendent of the Sakakawea District. When I was a kid on the family farm in South Dakota. My Mom had a plant in our home that we affectionately referred to as the Revival Plant. I'm not sure what kind of a plant it was, but it was in a hanging basket in dining room.

What was striking about this plant was that it was obvious when it was in need of water. The usually bushy branches and leaves of the plant would hang limp and lifeless from the pot. Whichever one of us saw it first, Mom or myself, we'd call to the other. "We need a revival over here!" Then one of us would get a glass of water and we'd water the plant and almost instantly watch that plant come back to life.

The branches and leaves would once again reach upward giving the plant shape and definition. The plant seemed to lift its arms in the gesture of praise for the renewed life within its veins. That's a great memory that mom and I share from years past.

There are those that say the Church of today, including our United Methodist Church is in need of revival. That it is lifeless, lacking in vitality, that it is truly thirsty. It is in need of a fresh pouring out of God's spirit. That's why during this season of Lent, together we've been examining Adam Hamilton's book, *Revival* that takes a look at the way in which John Wesley lived out his Christian faith. Wesley actually brought shape, definition, and life to what we now know as the United Methodist Church.

One of the key ingredients to the life of faith for John Wesley was that of truly "living it out." Faith wasn't just about knowing the right truths or principles or, just having a relationship with the right person, namely Jesus. Though Wesley would say each of those are very important. But

Wesley also believed that living out our faith, putting it in action was and is a must for anyone claiming to be a follower of Jesus.

In fact, another author I have read concerning Wesley's life and faith used the word "propel," to express Wesley's sense of our involvement in the world as people of faith. He wrote that Wesley believed our faith needed to propel us into the world. To make a difference in the lives of those that we meet on this journey of life and faith

This same sentiment is expressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, in which he writes: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, and which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." *Ephesians 2:8-10*

Did you catch that? Paul writes that "good works" is to be our way of life. He's not saying that we earn our way to God by our good work, not at all. Rather the point is that our response to the gift of salvation, or the fruit of our salvation is that of good works, or living out our faith. Allowing our faith to shape our behavior and response to the world around us.

Wesley believed and taught that acts of mercy; feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and the homeless, visiting those in prison; that through all of these ways, and so many other, it allow us to touch people who are the least, the last and the lost. Which was and is an important form of Jesus' Kingdom work here on earth.

Wesley also believed that these ways of living out our faith were also Means of Grace. Ways in which God was at work in us and through us as Kingdom people. But more than that, these were also ways that we experience and receive God's sanctifying Grace in our lives today. In other words, God shapes us through the actions that we take to care for those in need or, to live out our faith in the world, in the community in which we live.

In this chapter on Works of Mercy, in the book *Revival* Adam Hamilton writes, "When churches stop actively serving others – the elderly, the

young, the sick, the prisoners, the hungry, the poor, those on the margins – something in those churches and in their people begins to die.”

Those are incredibly powerful words and also very true words. A church body, the body of believers loses that sense of outward focus, of loving God by loving neighbor in order to share the message of hope and good news. When the Church stops looking beyond their walls to see the mission field in their midst, something truly dies within that body of believers.

You see, Jesus didn't settle for just reaching the 12 disciples, and calling it good. Everywhere he went, Jesus was constantly seeing and reaching out to those in need; those who needed a word of encouragement, a moment of his time, a kind word, a healing touch.

Jesus was continually seeing and reaching out to those that the world in that day seemed unwilling or unable to see. Jesus let those people know that they mattered to him. They mattered to God

For John Wesley, there was no tension between loving God and loving neighbor. They were simply different aspects of the same gospel message.

Lent is a wonderful season for self-examination and reflection. But my hope for all of us is that during this week as we reflect on how we live out our faith, that we'll actually put those thoughts into action. That each of us will find some way to express our faith, by participating in some work of mercy that touches lives in the communities in which we live.

Of course my real hope is that these “works of mercy” won't just be a one-time thing, but that we'll each make it a regular part of the expression of our Christian faith. This expression of faith allows God's love and message of hope and grace to flow through our hands and hearts as we seek to touch lives. Make a difference in this world, for Christ's sake

When we do this, see the value of the works of mercy and make them a regular part of the living of our faith, then revival will happen within our churches and more importantly, within our hearts.

Today, don't just talk the talk, walk the walk, put your faith in action and experience God's grace by getting your hands dirty for God.

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