

SERMON - THE SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT - 23 NOVEMBER 2008
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded.

Good works! The fruit of good works! Stir up the wills of thy faithful people!

A preacher once said that the resurrection of the dead was not such a big deal, he had to do that with his congregation each Sunday morning.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people.

We are now at the last Sunday in Trinity Season, the time where we look at ourselves and our relationship with God in the day-to-day and in the mundane aspects of life.

We are a week away from the anticipation season of Advent, the anticipation of Christmas and an awareness of the second coming of Christ.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people.

I have found it is easier, a lot easier, to stir up the will of the faithful in those special times during the year like Easter or Christmas than it is during the long green season of Trinity.

But it is important for us to keep ourselves enthused, to keep ourselves motivated at all times, not just at those particular times of liturgical excitement. It is important for us because we can not always expect to live on the mountain tops. We will spend a lot more time of our journeys in the shadowy valleys.

We have to go through the valleys of our lives to get to the mountain tops.

And we have to keep the momentum going wherever we are. We have to keep the momentum going wherever we are so that we can *plenteously bring forth the fruit of*

good works.

Matthew 5:16 (ESV) *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

James 2:14 (ESV) *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*

James 2:17 (ESV) *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

We exhibit our faith through our works, our good works.

And what are those works that we are supposed to do?

Let's look at the most important one first, prayer. The Benedictine model which Anglican worship is based upon puts *opus dei*, the work of God or prayer first in the order of importance.

We, as Christians, as Anglicans, are called first and foremost to pray. We are to pray individually in our homes and we are to pray collectively in our churches. We are to pray without ceasing through offering who we are and what we do always for the Glory of God.

Our work is always to be performed prayerfully, invoking God that everything we do may be prompted by His inspiration and brought by Him to its completion. John Trithemius wrote, *We should pray without ceasing because we cannot complete anything without God's help.*

Prayer always comes first.

There is a story from The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. *If you are your manual labor in your room and it comes time to pray, do not say, "I will use up my*

supply of branches or finish weaving the little basket, and then I will rise.” but rise immediately and render to God the prayer that is owed him. Otherwise, little by little you will come to neglect your prayer and your duty habitually, and your soul will become a wasteland devoid of every spiritual and bodily work.

We are to pray for we are creatures of prayer, for we are created to pray, to communicate with God.

What then are the other Good Works that we are supposed to do?

Let’s listen to what Jesus had to say on that subject. **Matthew 25:35-40 (ESV)**

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

Saint James tells us, **James 1:27 (ESV)** *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

And we are to do all this in a sense of love, love for God and love for each other. Turning again to a saying from John Trithemius, *Love is the first virtue. Love is required of each believer; whatever is done in love merits nothing.*

Love is what separates works from Good Works. Paul tells us, **1 Cor. 13:1-2 (ESV)**

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a

clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Faith without works is dead. Works without love is meaningless. Life without God is dead.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded.

Amen.