

God's Handiwork...For Good Works
Ephesians 2:8-10
 January 17, 2010
 Michael Carey

How exciting to see all those photos! The 200 of you who volunteered yesterday gave a real boost to our mission partners. Even if you were doing behind-the-scenes work—maintenance, landscaping, sorting, cleaning—you gave them a real shot in the arm! Those of you hoping to feed the hungry had a disappointment – most of the homeless didn't get the word of the Saturday afternoon gathering, but your meal was gratefully received by those who gathered in Fellesmere at Operation Hope. More and more, the people of Trinity are building relationships with these partners. Keep praying for their success.

I want to begin with a story. A man dies and of course, St. Peter meets him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in.

The man says, "OK, I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points!" "Three points?" he says.

"Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service." Terrific!" says St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point." One point!?!" he moans, now really getting worried.

"I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." "Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says. "Two points!" the man cries. "At this rate the only way I'll get into Heaven is by the grace of God!"

"Bingo, 100 points! Come on in my son!"

In Ephesians 2:8 Paul summarizes the amazing news: *for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.* We're not saved by our faith; we're saved by God's love in action—his gracious gift of Jesus Christ, who lived for us, died for us, and was raised for us. Our faith, our trust in God, allows us to receive the righteousness that we can not accomplish. That's why Paul writes, *this is not from yourselves.*

It's like hearing that a rich uncle has left you a legacy worth millions of dollars. There's no way you can earn that kind of money; there's no way you can believe it into existence. You receive it by sheer grace—if you believe the news and cash the check; if you are willing to receive that which is beyond your capability.

To make sure that we get it, Paul adds that this salvation is *not by works, so that no one can boast.* God gets the glory. God made us for eternal life and restores us to eternal life when our sin brings death. As verse 10 declares: *For we are God's handiwork...we are His good works...created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

It may not have occurred to you that yesterday's good works were prepared in advance by God. You see, God is constantly working to fashion people who will advance His truth and His kindness in this sad, suffering world, people who will work in concert with His Spirit to advance His Kingdom. The Lord works through all people everywhere; the Bible is very clear that God cares for and utilizes people of every religion as well as people of no religion—remember it was the Persian King Cyrus who brought the Jews back from exile in Babylon!

God seeks to draw everybody into His work of restoring justice and righteousness. Most useful for God's work are those who have been saved by grace through faith, because the relationship facilitates God's work within them. When we become *God's handiwork*, the Holy Spirit enters us and dwells within us, helping us reach our unique potential. That Spirit works within us to change our attitudes and aspirations. So instead of giving as the world gives—a

little here and there—the Spirit fashions sacrificial givers. Over time we become less self-centered. We down-size; spending less on ourselves; it becomes our joy to invest more in helping others.

And the Holy Spirit gives us direction, because God is preparing our work in advance. And the Spirit's powerful presence helps us to work together, putting aside our egos, forging teams of servants. We work hard and smart, doing things that don't just make us feel good, but really bless others. When jobs disappear or earthquakes devastate, we give hand outs. By building relationships we become one of the ways that God can give people a hand up. *We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Today we celebrate the excitement we experience when church isn't just a gathered group, but disbursed disciples. Of course we understand that God is advancing His Kingdom not only through these ten local mission partners, but through every other ministry, as well as nonreligious groups, when they provide the comfort, healing, and empowerment God wants to give. That's why our office sent out these Community Impact Surveys; we want to validate and celebrate every hour that the Trinity church family contributes in this community. Please fill it out and send it in. If your household needs more than one form, pick up more at the Resource Desk. Please try to return them by Wednesday—we want to tabulate and celebrate the time you give as school or hospital volunteers, serving on boards, and working through service agencies...

It's our hope that many of Trinity' members eventually become people of godly influence in this community, especially as we serve our neighbors. Of course, for some of you, your primary commitment is to serve within the church. It's just as important. As God's people, we are called to minister to our own children, youth, and adults. Praise God, a lot of the community finds its way here! But a few years ago we realized that only a few members were serving in an ongoing way in the community. To get more balance, we began emphasizing how the church should be sent; not just one Saturday in January, but year round.

This past year we've sent members monthly to serve at Daily Bread and Project Light. This past year a number of our folks have become ongoing volunteers at the DOCK in the Booker T. Washington Community. Some of our Life Groups, like this one, have been supporting the DOCK with maintenance and repair work. But the wonderful facility we helped to build allows us to build relationships. This photo of Dave Tamaccio, conveys the mutual joy that God gives, when His handiwork is faithful in doing the good works He prepared for them. A few days ago, I asked Dave, along with Jack and Carol Clark to share some of what it's been like. My first question was, "What do you do there on Wednesday afternoons?" (To hear David, Jack, and Carol's testimonies, please go to www.trinitypres.net)

Of course, there are other partners that offer ongoing service opportunities. Several of these allow you to build relationships with those who are struggling...especially Project Light, those adults and teenagers who lead a monthly sidewalk Sunday School; and Daily Bread; you could join those members who serve food there once a month.

We don't do these things out of fear or guilt; we do good works because God has prepared the way to bless us as we bless others.

We are saved by grace through faith; God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works - which God prepared in advance for us to do!