

What Do We Do Here?

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Church of the Servant, Wilmington, NC
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It's that busy time of year. If anyone in your household goes to school or teaches in a school, you're getting in gear. And even if you're not tied to the school schedule, lots of other activities and organizations use September as a start-up or speed-up time. That's true for us here at church too. I hope you've already had a chance to visit today's Ministry Fair to find out more about different organizations and activities here at Church of the Servant.

This is a good time of year for thinking about why we do the things we do. School and work— those we have to do, no choice. But other activities: clubs, organizations, exercise groups, and church—we have a choice about these. It's good to remind ourselves of why we come to church each Sunday, of what coming to church *does*.

Part of the answer of why we come to church is pretty obvious. We come here to see each other, to be together, to share our joys and sorrows. (And speaking of sharing joys, I hope you have heard that the Chapman family has a new little member, Simon Patrick, born just last Sunday.) Some of us come because we like the silence; some because we like the music; some because we like to be reminded of our faith. But there's another reason for coming to church, something else we do here: *we change the world*. Just coming here on a Sunday morning is changing the world.

Think of the words and images we encounter here. Forgiveness, love, hope, courage, faith. Think of the stories we hear, the stories we are a part of. In today's Old Testament reading, God has brought Moses and the enslaved Hebrews to a pivotal moment. They've experienced suffering, abuse, and mistreatment. They've called out to God. God has brought Moses along, and prepared him and them for the big push toward freedom. And now God says, "This is it. Get ready. Mark your doors with the blood of a sacrificed lamb, with blood that symbolizes life. Get ready to travel light. Eat the special meal—but don't save any leftovers for later—you are out of here." The moment of courage, of action, had come.

If you've ever been to a friend's house for a Passover Seder, you know that the leap to freedom is celebrated, but not as a thing of the past. It's not something that happened to our ancestors way back then. The celebration (that God instructs Moses about in today's lesson) is about what happens to us, now, in the present. Sitting around the Seder table the family says, "*We* were slaves in Egypt. *We* called out to God. *We* made the journey to freedom."

When we hear this story in church on a Sunday, it changes us. It changes how we see the world. When we are abused or suffer disrespect, we say, "We recognize this; this is the story of suffering that leads to freedom." And when we see others who are abused or suffering, we can't say, "Oh, that's their problem." No, we say, "We know their story. It's our story too. They are us." When we have moments in our lives which demand that we fish or cut bait, that we step forward with courage, we say, "That's my story; that's our story, stepping forward with courage, trusting God, acting to do God's will."

Wise people have always known that the way you think about your situation can be very powerful, leading you either to hope or despair. I remember teachers back in school saying, "It's all about your attitude." In

our time, there is a therapy which focuses on changing the things we say to ourselves, changing the tapes that play in our heads. And some of us know about daily affirmations. What a difference there is between looking in the mirror in the morning and saying, "I'm going to have a rough day," and saying, "It's going to be a great day." Scientists can now show that what we say to ourselves over and over—or what we hear over and over—or what we do over and over—these leave actual tracks in our brains. Our brains are physically changed by anything we repeatedly say, hear, think, and do. Imagine how the world is changed when our brains forge paths based on repeated, insistent messages of love and forgiveness and liberation.

And here at this altar each week, we tell a story similar to that of Moses. We tell how Jesus also was willing to step forward with courage to live a life based on justice and liberation. We tell how Jesus was dedicated to God's truth of love and forgiveness and put his life on the line to live out that truth. We encounter his transforming power week after week. Together we take ordinary bread and wine and through the Holy Spirit change them into the body and blood of Christ—they radiate the life of One who did not diverge from the path of integrity and compassion. We take that radiant, powerful life into ourselves and take it out into the world.

The displays in our Ministry Fair today are some of the many expressions of how God has changed us and sent us to change the world. Our gospel tells of Jesus giving his followers the authority to create a radically new community. Jesus promises that his transforming power will be with them. He promises us that when even "two or three are gathered together" in his name, his life of hope and power will be there. Let us thank God for the opportunity to be together "doing" church, filling our minds and hearts with transforming words and images, and celebrating God's power—right here, right now—changing the world.