

Sermon for June 28, 2020 by Pastor Hanberry at Trinity UCC, Manchester, MD –
“A ‘Doing and Being: Which Is It? It’s Not ‘Either/OR;’ It’s ‘Both/And’”
(Ser20-26)

We live our lives in more than one dimension. Often, we live in the tensions between one thing and another. For instance, there is the tension—especially in these days—between the world we live in (“*the one we’ve inherited*” and the world we would like to be living in (“*the world as we would like it to be*”). Maybe it’s always that way for us. Only those who’ve lived a long time would know how to critique that possibility. Maybe, most likely, in all the periods of our lives we’ve wanted the world in which we live to be better than the period in which we’re living at the time. There are those times when we are delighted with our life...it’s as good as it gets, we sometimes say.

If we’re really honest, it seems pretty true that these times (Covid 19, political disunity in our society, and racial unrest in the extreme) are not going to be written about as the best of times...maybe more likely: these are the worst of times, but times nonetheless that give us hope. Actually, however, if you’re living in a nursing home and you have so far stayed healthy and Covid 19-free, this period could be judged as still a good phase of your life.

We live with a range of tensions: being happy about one thing and at the same time being sad about something else; doing well financially and wondering if you will ever have enough income to retire; being retired and feeling healthy enough to travel and not having enough income to afford to travel the way you’d like; or wanting to be the kind of Christian disciple that follows the Spirit’s leading to change and grow and the dis-comfort making changes in our lives brings to us. We want to change. We want to be more caring of others. We want to do more for the church but the church keeps calling us out of our comfort zones, e.g., putting on a mask and gloves and helping folks who gather three days a week to hand out food to folks in the parking lot between Immanuel Lutheran and Trinity. We also live in the tension between ‘doing’ and ‘being.’ I talked about this last week in the version of my sermon that finally came out of my mouth in our zoom worship Sunday. I asked the question in that sermon about what new ideas or what new message we might get from the re-telling of the story of the Good Samaritan. In reviewing the context in which Jesus tells this story, he also visits the home of Mary and Martha (and Lazarus). After telling the lawyer the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells the lawyer “go and do the same thing” that the Good Samaritan did for the man he found beaten up in a ditch by the road.

But when Jesus visits Mary and Martha and Martha complains to Jesus that Mary is shirking her household chores, Jesus tells Mary to “sit and listen.” I which is it really? To what are we called in our Christian, Spiritual journey? To do? Or to Be? We live in this tension as well, the tension of doing vs. being. I

might as well say it as I see it: It is not either/OR. It is both/AND. But that doesn't change the reality of the tension to which this brings us. Because it is Both/And, ALWAYS, Both/And, that we live in this tension: How much do we DO vs. how much do we "sit and listen to the Spirit"? What is a balance between the two? Indeed, how much do we sit and pray for direction for what to do in our lives VS Can we do too much waiting and praying and not enough doing?

I faintly remember the first time I preached on the text for today from Matthew 10, verses 40-42. Just three verses. Like another preacher I read about this week, I thought I had a rousing sermon on reaching out to the little ones, giving a cup of water to those who need it, and seeing Jesus. I even told a story about Pat, my wife, who, while eating a meal at a local fast-food establishment while in Honduras and *"seeing the image of Jesus in the face of a homeless man who needed a hamburger."*

It's like another story from Jesus, another command from Jesus to "go and do likewise; go and do the same; go and DO. DO. DO!! **Welcome!!**

But sometimes, like right now, maybe, I just need to sit and listen. I need to sit and be quiet and reflect on my life. Last Sunday in our zoom-based joys and concerns, one of our members shared that as she listened to my sermon, and remembered my sermon several weeks back about our being called to be anti-racist, she needed to "take stock" of her life and figure out how she could be a better Christian in these days. She knows she's called to "go and do the same," but she doesn't always know what to do; she doesn't always know how God is leading her to do what she "believes" she is called to do. Sharing (really confessing that need and hope) is a good place to be.

For those of us who are extremely busy in our work and jobs and family, there is precious little time to "sit and listen" to the Spirit of Jesus. For some, that's the gift of worship, even worship by zoom. But even then, we can miss the benefit of listening to the spirit when we're not worshipping back in our favorite pew in the upstairs sanctuary of Trinity UCC on York St. in Manchester, MD. This brings me to the tension in which we all are living: When will be able to worship again in-person in the church? How much longer do we have to wait? VS. How do I worship now with my church community?

'Time' is elusive. *"Keeping time, tending time, and spending time all matter."* In an anonymous 14th Century mystical text, "The Cloud of Unknowing," it says, *"keep exact account of time by means of love."* Even in keeping time, we are called to do something...to *"keep time by means of love."*

One writer in a recent issue of "The Christian Century," bi-weekly magazine for the thinking Christian, with the subtitle, "Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully," says this about time: *"The most tempting way to keep account of time these days is in increments of how long it will take for things to go back to the way*

they were. Will it take four weeks, eight weeks, all summer, a year? How long until we can put all this behind us?" ("Faith Matters," in CC, May 6, 2020, Stephanie Paulsell).

This writer, doer and contemplative, goes on to say this, I long for the day when I can teach in a classroom and worship in a church and fly on a plane to visit my parents. Love makes me count the hours. But keeping account of time by love with the saints also means resisting the desire to go back to the way things were. Because that way is marked by economic and social inequality that has made the burden of this virus fall hardest on the most disadvantaged, by a health-care system that leaves so many unprotected, by the ridiculously low pay that people doing the most necessary jobs receive. None of this can be accounted for by love. It's not enough to want our old life back. Especially in the season of Easter, we are called to make room for more life—not just for ourselves, but for everyone.

And it's at this point in bringing this sermon to its conclusion, that I share one more thought from Stephanie Paulsell, *"If there's one thing we've learned through the work of social distancing, it's that everyone's life matters to everyone else's. As we struggle to inhabit the time we have been given, that's a measurement by which to keep account of our days."*

Even though in being a Christian that keeps account of time by loving, by doing, and I would add by living well in the tension between doing and being, we still are called to be intentional about how we love the other, how we welcome the other, how we welcome the Little Ones, how we welcome Jesus into our lives and our worship. Amen.