

Preached by Kathy Newbold  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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John 13:34  
James 2:14-22, 24

## **SIGN-UP SHEETS ARE IN THE NARTHEX**

Good morning. Since I am usually in the back of the church, in the choir loft, my perspective of you is from the rear, or in profile; I think I like this perspective better! When Betty Miller asked if I would offer this message, my first response was to politely decline. What could I possibly have to offer? Typically I subscribe to the Mark Twain school of public speaking—the one whose motto is, “It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.” But Betty was prepared for refusal—I think she’s had a stint on the Nominating Committee—she requested that I prayerfully consider for a week and then let her know. She said she had sought God’s guidance in the matter and the response she got to the question of who should present the message this Sunday was “Kathy Newbold.” I wanted to say, “Betty, can’t you take a joke? He was only kidding. This only proves God has a great sense of humor!” But I didn’t. I pondered and prayed and the idea niggled at me, and ultimately, I agreed to speak. I claim no great theological insight; I believe I am a simple person ... and I know many of you would agree with that assessment. But accept the task I did, and I hope my message will resonate with you.

This is Presbyterian Women Sunday, but the subject of my message is not reserved for women or for Sundays. I gave you a hint in the sermon title ... “Sign Up Sheets Are In the Narthex.” I am speaking about something that applies to every person in this congregation—young, old, man, woman, child. It is an activity that some 64 million people participated in last year. One fourth of all men and one third of all women engaged in this pastime. Two in five sought the opportunity; the rest were sought for their service. Among the reasons people gave for engaging in the activity were: (1) to feel needed; (2) to feel good; and (3) to have fun. What in the world am I talking about? I am talking about Volunteerism—the free will offering of one’s time and talents, without compulsion or expectation of financial compensation.

I remember my first volunteer experience. I was in the third grade, and as luck would have it, my twin sister Candace was in the same class. The teacher asked for a volunteer—to do what, I don’t remember—and Candace’s hand shot up in the air. She waved it madly until the teacher recognized her—and then she said “Kathy will do it.” Thus began a lifelong habit.

But why do I consider this an appropriate topic for church? How does being a Christian volunteer differ from other forms of volunteering? I suggest the answer lies in what motivates the service. Why should we, as Christians, volunteer? As the method actors always ask, what is our motivation?

Let me offer a few suggestions:

First and foremost:

***It is what we are called to do as disciples of Christ.***

John 13:34 *“A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Jesus Christ was the ultimate Volunteer Coordinator, and the disciples were the consummate volunteers. They are our role models for volunteering. When called, they responded. When they didn't know, they asked. In all things, they prayed. Their motivation was to serve God. The disciples left behind the lives they knew to follow Christ and to work for His kingdom on earth. We are called to do the same thing: to work for God on earth—to be his hands, and feet ... His Presence—in the community and in the world.

I struggle with the concept of “call.” I am not sure what “call” looks like or sounds like. But, I have acted upon the prodding of some internal voice that just would not leave me in peace. This was not true—to my knowledge—when I got the call from Chris Motley to do a return engagement on Session. She was very persistent, and I agreed. But, it was Chris making the call. In 2005 when Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, it was a different sort of experience; I think God called me to respond. It wasn't a clarion call with lightning and trumpets—it was general disquietude. From the time the National Capital Presbytery mission was announced until the day I volunteered to go, I tried NOT to go. I thought of all the “stuff” I had here—my family, my work, appointments, etc.—and each objection was satisfied by an acceptable alternative, until I had no reason NOT to go. Carl and I discussed it once—how perhaps we were selfish—we just wanted to feel good. But the feeling I came away with after that experience was not “what a good person I am”; but rather, “Thank you God for giving me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of these people.” My contribution was infinitesimal compared to the need, but I did what I could. And in that place, at that time, I truly sensed God's presence guiding my efforts.

Which leads me to my second point:

***Faith by itself unaccompanied by deeds is not sufficient.***

In the lesson from James read earlier, he poses the question. “*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?*” And he answers, “... *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by actions, is dead.*”

Faith without works is nothing. I am not talking about earning salvation through deeds. We believe that by grace we were brought into this world and through faith by grace, our eternal life is assured. However, that does not relieve us of our duty to be actively engaged in this world and to perform acts of kindness and charity.

Righteous action is evidence of genuine faith. Khalil Gibran, in his work, *The Prophet*, said, “...all work is empty save where there is love; and when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself and to one another, and to God...and what is it to work with love? It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit...Work is love made visible.” Indeed, work is love made visible. It is more than emotion; it is not just feeling, but doing. Christianity is not a spectator activity; it calls for the personal commitment and active participation of all. Volunteering is a means by which we actively participate in the life of the church and the community, enlivening our faith and embodying our love.

And why else should Christians volunteer? That is my third point:

***Because you can...you are able to do so.***

*God don't make junk.* I have always found that expression, ungrammatical though it is, strangely comforting. According to 1 Peter 4:7, “*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*”

God endows each of us with unique skills, talents, interests, and insights. By so doing, He equips us to serve Him and our fellow man. Now some say, what can I do? What difference can I make? I am just one person. In response, I would offer the words of Edward Everett Hale: “I

am only one. But still I am one. I cannot do everything. But still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can.”

Subscribing to that attitude, individual members of the Bush Hill family join together to build houses with Habitat for Humanity, teach and encourage through the Christian education and fellowship ministries, and feed the hungry at Miriam’s Kitchen. Some volunteers take the message of God’s love across the nation and the globe. All are responding in concrete, visible ways to the commandment that we love one another.

In that vein, a recent change has occurred in the way this church categorizes its programs and services. Where we used to have “programs”—a word which connotes procedure and policy—we now have “ministries”—a word which speaks to service and the servant church. The change is not semantic; it is a profound. It underscores the commitment of this church to minister—to one another, to the community, and to the world.

Do you remember the song *I’m in with the “In” Crowd*? The lyrics went something like this ...“I’m in with the “In” crowd; I go where the “In” crowd goes. I’m in with the “In” crowd, and I know what the “In” crowd knows.” There’s an *“In” Crowd* here at Bush Hill. It is composed of everyone who contributes their time and talent in the work of the church—all those who step up to accept the jobs that must be done—jobs, large and small, visible or behind the scenes. And the good news is: membership is open to all. There should never be any grousing here about being on the outside looking in. There are opportunities for all—and the benefits are extraordinary!

Lastly, as some of you know, I am a Marine. One of the things I most enjoy about the Corps is its unique and colorful language, full of acronyms: ASAP – as soon as possible; UA – unauthorized absence; SNAFU – situation normal, all fouled up. Such economy of words; a few letters convey huge ideas. So today I offer you an acronym for what it takes to be a Christian volunteer: that acronym is YES— Y-E-S.

“Y” stands for You, with your unique gifts and talents. You are God’s presence on earth, employing the gifts He has given you in service to your fellow man. Further you know yourself better than anyone else; you know where your interests lie and what your strengths are. That self-knowledge and your God-given abilities equip you to respond as needs arise.

“E” is for enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is infectious; it is energizing. Enthusiasm can be a force multiplier—and it can sustain volunteers.

“S” stands for sincerity. The word has its roots in Latin: Sin-without (cera-wax). In Roman times, when potters fired their clay pots, cracks sometimes developed. Unscrupulous craftsman would seal those cracks with wax, paint over the blemish and market the vessel as perfect. True craftsman would discard flawed pieces and market their products as “sin cera”—without wax. That is how the Christian volunteer must present herself or himself—genuine, straightforward, earnest, without artifice.

There you have it—an acronym for what it takes to be a Christian volunteer— Y-E-S!

That’s my message. Why should you volunteer? You motivation is threefold:

- It is what we are called to do as disciples of Christ.
- Faith by itself unaccompanied by deeds is not sufficient.
- You have the ability to do so.

Sign-up sheets are in the narthex. Prayerfully consider the opportunities; consider your abilities, especially availability, and just say YES. Amen.