

*God's Handiwork: Created to Serve*  
*Psalm 8; Matthew 5:13-16; Ephesians 2:1-10*  
*Salem United Methodist Church*  
*June 12, 2016*  
*Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling*

As we celebrate our graduates and several ministries of our church, we are also celebrating that we matter to God. We are God's handiwork created to serve as salt and light in the world. We matter to God and are created for a purpose. And God gives us the power to change the world.

There are three questions that each of us asks at one time or another in our lifetime. We might even ask them more than once in our life, perhaps we ask them at each stage of our life. The first question is, "Who am I?" The second question is, "What is my purpose?" And the last question is, "Where do I belong?" Have you ever asked these questions? I have. Knowing who we are is a process, probably because in some ways we change as we go through the various stages of life. We can also change because of relationships. We can go from being a son or a daughter to being a father or a mother. So we ask ourselves again, "Who am I?"

The Psalmist asks this question in Psalm 8. As the writer thinks about God the creator of the universe, the heavens and the earth, the writer asks, "Who am I that you would care for me?" The writer recognizes that God is awesome and vast, yet we are very special to God. So special that God puts us in charge of everything on this earth. We are in charge of God's handiwork. We are told in this Psalm who we are. Did you hear it? We are God's favorite part of creation. You are God's favorite; I am God's favorite. That's who I am. That's who we are! Every human on the face of this earth is God's favorite. Think about that the next time you ride the metro or go shopping. Everyone is God's favorite.

The Psalm also tells us that God created us for a purpose. Did you hear that? What did it say our purpose is? We are to care for God's creation. Our world is a gift from God and we are to care for this gift. Parents often give pets to their children so they can learn how to care for something. What happens if you don't feed your pet, or forget to give it water? Scientists estimate that we are losing dozens of species every day. By the middle of this century as many as 30-50 percent of species will be extinct. The cause of mass extinction is not caused by natural events such as asteroid strikes, volcanic eruptions, etc., but by the activity of humans. When our work teams go into Appalachia, they often see firsthand the destruction that we are doing to the mountains with mountain top mining. Whole tops of mountains are being carved away to find coal so we can have heat and electricity. The destruction of the top of the mountains is causing mudslides which damage to or destroy the precarious homes further down the mountain. What is our purpose? Each of us has a different purpose, some may be called to develop software that will benefit humankind, some may be called to protect our nation, others may be called to create vaccines, or to teach, or to preach, but our first purpose is to preserve this wonderful gift, God's handiwork.

Did you notice that the word, "handiwork" turned up twice in our scriptures? The second time was in Ephesians. It was in the last verse of the passage, verse 10. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Not only is all creation God's handiwork, but we are part of God's creation, part of God's handiwork. Have you ever created something? Perhaps you built something, sewn something,

drawn something. Usually there is a sense of pride in our handiwork. So God has pride in us. God didn't create us just to look at us, but Paul writes God created us for a purpose. Did you catch what that purpose is, "to do good works." This is the theme verse for our Appalachia Service Projects teams this year. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Each person on the teams will be doing good work with their hands. As they work in teams they will be making the homes of those in need warmer, safer, and drier. Many of us when our home needs a roof or the furnace breaks have the resources for repairs, but these folks do not, so they live the best they with what they have. Whatever kind of good works we do, we are adding seasoning to someone's life or illuminating their darkness. We are being what Jesus called us to be, being salt and light.

Well, we've answered the first two questions, but what about the third question, "Where do I belong?" All of us want to belong somewhere. We may first belong to our families. For those who don't have families or functioning families, they will seek a place to belong. Gangs or fringe groups can be the receptacles for those who need to belong somewhere. Paul offers us an answer to this question, "Where do I belong?" Paul says we have two choices. We either belong to gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Or we choose to belong to God. You see we matter to God. God could have said, "Well, if they don't want me, I don't want them." But instead out of God's great love for us through Jesus' death and resurrection, God says, "No matter what, you are mine. You belong with me." That is what we call grace. By God's grace we are saved. By God's grace we belong. We are God's handiwork to do good works.

Last week at Annual Conference I was given this shirt. On the front it says, "Church can happen anywhere." What do you think that means? The back of the T-shirt gives one explanation. We are to put our beliefs into actions. So what are our beliefs? We believe that we are special to God. We are God's handiwork. We believe that God has given each person a purpose: to care for God's creation and to do good works. And we believe that we belong to God. Church is a place where we can feel like we belong. Church can happen anywhere, wherever and whenever we let others know they belong, wherever and whenever we show others that they have a purpose, and wherever and whenever we help others find out who they are. Church can happen wherever and whenever lives are changed. This is for some perhaps a new way of thinking about church. So where and when can you make church happen? Whose lives may be changed? Can we rethink how we are the church?

**Resources:** "The Extinction Crisis" from Center for Biological Diversity ([www.biologicaldiversity.org](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org)); [www.rethinkchurch.org](http://www.rethinkchurch.org)

