

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

**Good Shepherd Church, December 15, 2024**

**“Do the Good that Is Yours to Do”**

## *Young at Heart Message*

Let's channel our inner child for a moment and pretend that we are sitting around a large pool of water. The water is still – so still that it could be glass. Can you picture it?

Now, I have a bowl of rocks here. Each rock has a word on it. Words like “passion, trust, focus, hope, and happiness.”

These rocks are special rocks because, as they are tossed into the pool, the ripples they create will manifest the words on the rocks in each of us.

But, they do require some energy from the person who tosses them into the pool. As a rock is tossed into the pool, it drains a small amount of energy from the person tossing the rock.

So, for example, if I throw a rock that says “happiness” into the pool, happiness would ripple outward to each of you, but it would drain a small amount of my own energy at the same time.

Now, what do you suppose would happen if I dumped all of these rocks with their words on them into the pool at once?

Essentially, it would make one huge splash, there would be one huge ripple effect, and you would each get blasted with love, hope, focus, trust, happiness, and whatever else all at once. And, a lot of my own energy would drain in the process.

That one big ripple manifesting all of these words at once might be powerful initially, but because all of the rocks are going in at once, they are essentially creating one ripple. So the impact that each rock, and therefore each word, has on you might be quite small by the time it reaches you.

Not to mention, I will have just spent a lot of my own energy sending these words to manifest in you all at once.

But, what if, instead, I passed this bowl of rocks around to each of you, and each of us threw just one rock into the pool?

Each of us would spend much less energy throwing the rocks into the pool, and the ripple effect would last much longer. We would each receive the ripples from each individual rock, and collectively, we would all have more than enough energy left so that we wouldn't feel totally drained.

Let's try that now. I will pass the bowl around. I would like each of you to take one rock from the bowl and toss it into the imaginary pool. As you do, say the word on your rock and imagine the ripples expanding outward to everyone in the room.

How did it feel to be able to give people this positive energy?

How did it feel to receive so much positive energy?

## ***The Message***

Today we are continuing with the Advent theme, Words for the Beginning. The words we are focusing on for today's message are "Do the work that is yours to do."

This is such an important message, especially in a community full of people who love to give.

As givers, we tend to want to do everything we can to help people. That in itself is not a bad thing. But, if we aren't careful, we may overdo it.

We could end up draining our own energy to the point where we are no longer able to give more of ourselves. Or, we can spread ourselves too thin.

For example, as a pastor I am often asked to participate in different ministries. I used to feel obligated to try to get involved with as many different organizations as I could.

However, in doing so, I was spreading myself too thin, and I wasn't really able to make an impact in any of the organizations. I was "involved" insofar as I might receive their newsletter or attend a meeting or two, but I didn't have time or energy to do much more than that.

Essentially, I was dropping all of my rocks into the pool at once, which minimized what each group or organization received from me, and completely drained my own energy or passion for ministry or service.

I began to realize that the best way for me to make any kind of impact was to focus on the things that gave me life and energized me, and let others do the things that gave them life and energized them.

In other words, I started to realize that I could only do the work that was mine to do. That meant doing the work that tapped into my own skills and abilities and that actually gave me energy rather than draining me.

It is not easy to discern what that work is all the time, because I am still often asked to do things that are outside of my skill set or my areas of passion or interest. And, it can create feelings of guilt to say no to something.

It is interesting, and of course intentional, that one of our scripture readings today was John the Baptist scolding the crowd for wanting to be baptized without having given up their sins.

When the crowd asks what they should do about it, John tells them to share what they have with those in need. For example, if someone has two coats, he suggests giving one to someone in need. Likewise, if someone has more than enough food, he suggests sharing with someone who does not have enough food.

But then the passage says that when tax collectors came to be baptized, they ask what they can do. (Remember that tax collectors were considered sinners in the eyes of most people at that time because, even though they were doing their jobs, they also were often taking more money than people actually owed.) John tells them not to make people pay more than they owe. In other words, he suggests they ensure they are ethical tax collectors that do their jobs, but with kindness and compassion.

Likewise, when the soldiers asked what they could do, he tells them not to ask people to pay money to be left alone. He suggests they should be happy with the pay they receive, rather than greedily demanding more money from the people.

John was giving the people examples of the work that was specifically theirs to do. The tax collectors had the unique responsibility of collecting taxes ethically. That was their good work to do.

The crowd at large was encouraged to look at the things they had and decide if there was anything they had more than enough of that they could share.

John wasn't asking everyone in the crowd to dump all of their rocks into the metaphorical pool at once. He was asking them to look at their own skills, abilities, and possessions and determine what it is that they could offer the world.

And this is the good news that we are invited to receive today: we are responsible for doing the good work that is *ours* to do. We are not responsible for doing everything.

We each have our own unique skills, talents, and resources. And we have a finite amount of energy. Our church collectively also has skills, talents, and resources that we can offer to the community.

But we are not meant to feel guilty for the work we cannot do. Rather, we are meant to be proud of the work that *is* ours to do, and we are invited to continue doing that work.

It is also important, I think, to remember that we should not feel guilty, as individuals or as a church, for the things we used to have time, energy, and resources for that we no longer do. We can be proud of the things we were once able to do, and we can be proud of the things we are still able to do.

And, we can continue doing the good work that is our to do in this time and place. We have, for example, recently learned that we have the resources, energy, and talents to support a refugee family's endeavor to land safely and securely in Calgary.

We also know that we have the ability to successfully offer opportunities for socializing for seniors. These are two strong ministries – one that has been happening for a while and one that is a newer opportunity for us. But both are ministries that give us energy and life rather than drain it.

These are two examples of the good work that is ours to do.

We are uniquely situated to bring light into the world. May we find courage this season to do the good that is ours to do. It matters. May we see the ripples of our actions expand outward, touching lives and mending the fabric of our shared humanity. Amen.

Let us pray: Listening God, we know that you are constantly speaking to us. Through music, scripture, nature, and relationships, you make yourself known again and again. In gratitude, we long to return the favor. In gratitude, we long to meet you halfway. So in this moment, we are quieting the noise in our heads. We are closing our eyes. We are leaning in. We are listening. We are doing the good that is ours to do. Speak to us through the chaos. Speak to us as only you can. With hope in our hearts we listen, we pray. Amen.