

## **“God at Work”**

**Romans 12:1, 6-13**

**September 25, 2022, sermon by Rev. Alex Creager**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.*

*<sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. <sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

**THANKS BE TO GOD.**

I had just met Tom a few days before. It was a hospital visit, and Tom was a member of our church. He had just moved to a step-down room and was doing very well. I remember that visit well, because Tom spent the whole-time telling jokes and stories, and was a such a joy-filled person. He loved people and conversation, and hearing what was going on at the church, and with myself, and sharing any funny story he could about the hospital stay. It was his heart that brought him in, but he was doing so much better now, and next week was expecting to go home. I hadn’t met Tom before then, because I had just started at this church,

and Tom's health didn't allow him to worship in person yet. But I was so excited after that visit to follow up with him, and see if him at his house, and hope to see him soon at church with us.

A few days later I went back to the hospital, hoping to see him right before he went back home. Before I exited the church doors, though, our pastoral care coordinator, Pat, stopped me. "Alex, the Prayer Shawl Ministry wants you to bring this shawl to Tom. I added a card as well, signed by a few of us that love Tom."

As I got the hospital, I remembered the bag, and brought it up to the room where Tom was. I was looking forward to hearing more jokes and stories and Tom's great big barrel laugh. When I got to the room, though, Tom wasn't there. The bed was empty, the room had been remade. I asked the desk where Tom was, and they told me down a couple of floors. They gave me the number, and as I got there, I realized quickly that this was an ICU unit. As I finally found Tom, he was by himself, unconscious, and hooked up to a breathing tube.

I raced around the unit, looking for someone who knew what had happened. Finally, I found his nurse. She told me that just a few hours ago, his heart gave way, and they moved him down here. She then said, "I shouldn't really tell you this, but it's not looking good. He probably doesn't have too much more time. We've tried calling the family, but no one has picked up yet. Could you please say a prayer for him? You might be the last one to visit him."

Slowly, I made my way over to his bed. I had no idea what to do or say. I was expecting to visit this jovial, lively Tom, talk stories, and meet again soon. I didn't come expecting to say final prayers and goodbye. I

was at a complete loss, until I noticed what was in my hand. The bag that Pat gave me. The prayer shawl that was knit by hand and prayed over by people who knew Tom and loved him dearly. I took out the prayer shawl, and I laid it on top of Tom. Then I took out the card that Pat had given me, opened it up and read the words out loud to Tom. I said a prayer or two from our Book of Common Worship. And then I said, "Tom, this shawl is a gift for you. It is made by people who love you. They are with you now. Their love is here. And God's love is here." I sat for a few minutes longer, holding Tom's hand, and then had to leave.

An hour later, Tom's family came – his mother and sisters, just as he passed. And the first thing they saw was that prayer shawl on him.

Those hands that made the shawl had no idea that this would be Tom's final gift to receive. They had no idea how much it would end up meaning to the family. Like me, they didn't know what would happen to Tom that day. But they did know that making it and praying over it was an act of love, an act of community, of care, and of presence.

Tom did not leave the world alone. But surrounded by prayer, by love, by care, by a gift knit just for him.

For me that was a day I saw God at work through the everyday people through our everyday gifts. It was the gifts of those who could knit. It was the gifts of those who could pray. It was the gifts of Pat who could write lovely cards. My gift was being someone who had the time and experience to visit people in the hospital.

None of them seem like that huge of gifts. Until we see them in action.

Today we get to bless these prayer shawls. We don't know yet where they will go to or who they will comfort and warm and serve with love. We don't know what will be going on with them when they receive them. I know it was a great comfort and joy for me seeing the prayer shawl for Nancy Miller at her home the last time I got to visit with her, knowing how much this community surrounded her with love.

What I do know is that along with blessing these prayer shawls, we are blessing the gifts of this community of faith. We are blessing the hands that made them, the hearts that care for them, the voices that pray for others.

So much of the time, we think it's others' gifts that have great value and worth, and we diminish our own. This day I want you to know that God has filled you with gifts too, gifts to serve and love, whether they be of teaching or praying, of leadership or working behind the scenes, of tending to a garden or making a meal, your gifts matter.

Your gifts especially are ways that you help share this good news – whatever we are going through in life, we are not alone. As you knit and sew, as you pray and sing, as you bake and tend, as you teach and write cards, and sing Happy Birthday to people on the phone, every time you do this, you are sharing a huge message – “God's love is here. You are loved by God, and you are not alone.”

That is the message I got to carry that day at the hospital years ago. “Tom, “God's love is here. You are not alone.” May we bless these shawls, these gifts, and the God's steadfast love that is here with us, in even the most difficult of days. Amen.