

Assembly Mennonite Church
July 5, 2020
Mennonite Disaster Service



Join us for this worship service live at 10am on Sunday!
Zoom Meeting ID: 999-527-5153, password: AMC

Prelude:

Bouree from 3rd Cello Suite by J.S. Bach - Conrad Liechty

Call to Worship

Song: What is this Place HWB #1

Peace Lamp

Song of reflection:

Build a House Rhiannon Giddions and Yoyo Ma

Offering Prayer

You may send a check to the church office, transfer money electronically through your bank, or through a [PayPal link on the church website](#).

Children's time: Leah and Aaron Hochstetler

Scripture: Mark 12:42

Storytelling: Darin Bontrager
(See text below)

Prayers and Sharing

Share prayer requests by filling out the online form [at this link](#). You may continue to do this throughout each week. Prayer requests are sent out to the congregation via the Assembly listserv on Wednesdays, and are also included in the Pastoral Prayer each Sunday.

Pastoral Prayer Karl Shelly

Benediction

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Thank you to everyone who contributed to the worship materials for this week!

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Other Assembly ongoing events:

For All Events: Zoom Meeting ID: 999-527-5153, password: AMC

Call to prayer: Join us on Zoom at 12 noon, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for a brief time of reading this week's psalm (from the lectionary) and prayer.

Community building: Join us for an online fellowship break, Sundays at 11 am, via Zoom (you'll need to provide your own coffee).

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Happy 8th Birthday to Emery Beechy-King! You can read more about Emery in the AssemblyLine

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Storytelling by Darin Bontrager
Text: Mark 12:42

Good Morning, I'm Darin Bontrager, and I've been attending Assembly Mennonite Church for almost 2 years. I am the Region 2 regional operations Coordinator for Mennonite Disaster Service, and that area represents essentially the Mississippi River to the Appalachian Mountains, Canada down to the Gulf. My role is to be a resource for the volunteers within that geographic area and help coordinate disaster response efforts and develop relationships with our volunteer base. I was asked to share this morning about MDS as it relates to our theme of "small acts of kindness," with Mark 12:42 as a reference point. Some preachers dive into the hermeneutics of the Mark 12:42 passage, discuss the cultural context, or attempt biblical exegesis. In fact, if I were to take Mark 12:38-40 out of context a little bit, it warns against teachers of the law that make a show of lengthy prayers, and these men will be punished most severely." In that light, I'll try and keep this short and sweet and to the point. However, what I will do is share some stories. I have always loved stories in all sorts of forms, whether it was reading Redwall, the Jack Tales, and Harry Potter in my early years, or later on travel/adventure stories like Into thin Air, A Walk in the Woods, or Endurance later in life. I have enjoyed attending Story Slams in Lancaster PA where community members shared stories from their past in 5 minutes or less with no props on vague topics that could be heart wrenching, hilarious, or quite somber. Stories bring us on a journey through the imagination. Some characters we can identify with, others we do not like, and some characters challenge our worldviews when we come back to reality. I believe Jesus knew the power of Story when he shared Parables, how it can encourage us to see the world differently, develop empathy, spur discussion, laughter, and inspiration.

When I was in Raleigh, NC in the Service Adventure house in 2008, there was a saying that hung above one of the doorways. "Never Doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." During most of the year I never gave that quote too much thought, and probably didn't think about it too much more until

I started working for Mennonite Disaster Service. The parallels between that quote and the origins of Mennonite Disaster Service are quite uncanny. MDS started in 1950 during a Sunday School Class Picnic in central Kansas that focused on how to provide mutual aid efforts by expressing the common desire to “seek opportunities to be engaged in peaceful, helpful activity... just where we find ourselves.” Many of the people in those early Sunday School class discussions were either Conscientious Objectors or had served in Civilian Public Service, or CPS, during World War II. Some of the first MDS responses were to flooding events around Wichita, KS. Soon word got out, and by 1966 the Red Cross more or less expected MDS to be present whenever a natural disaster occurs. I guess when you get a bunch of highly motivated Mennonites together and give them some food, some amazing things can happen.

Since 1950, MDS has grown and evolved quite a bit. However, throughout those changes MDS has maintained its grassroots history of being locally led and organized. Many churches and individuals that I interact with ask me after a natural disaster is MDS going to respond? I frequently turn the question around AND ASK THEM IF THEY ARE WILLING TO SERVE. Some people jump at the opportunity, and others believe they don't have the skills, the time, or the energy to serve with MDS. John Diller, who was paralyzed by a farming accident in the 1950's, was one of the first coordinators of MDS. He answered phone calls, recruited volunteers, built relationships with other non-profit agencies and local government officials, and had an incredible gift in writing preserved many of the early stories of MDS. He served in various organizing roles for over 20 years. He might have said it wasn't much and just a small way he could help, but it made all the difference.

If we fast forward a few years, MDS expanded our response capabilities from not only running chainsaws or mucking out flooded homes to repairs and new home construction. Frequently after MDS does a major repair or builds a new home, we have a home dedication. This is a time where we celebrate the homeowner, let them share their story, give a short blessing for the home, celebrate all the volunteers and community partners that helped make this goal a reality. This is also when we officially give the keys over to the homeowner and sign off on the official job card. This is often a very meaningful experience for everyone who attends. Sometimes a homeowner has been waiting for 4-6 years to return to their home. Their journeys are often full of despair, hopelessness, and trauma as they navigate loss, bureaucracy, and insecurity of their housing. As many of you know, walking into an empty house, even if it is new, feels a bit sterile and unwelcoming. Our volunteers wanted to change that, so Rebecca Sommers from here in Goshen, organized quilters her church to make wall hangings for homeowners who received an MDS home. That movement has quickly grown, and now we can joyfully share a wall-hanging with every homeowner during a home dedication. Rebecca and the other quilters might have said the quilts didn't take long, but it made all the difference to Ms Lilly after her home was flooded in 1997 in Kentucky.

In 2011, I was serving in Kingcome Inlet, British Columbia as a crew leader during my second internship with MDS as part of the Hesston College Disaster Management Program. The village was quite remote, and we would frequently see grizzly and black bear tracks throughout the community. This community of 80 people were flooded with a 15 ft wall of water washed through after an ice dam broke up river. We had youth groups coming in for a week at a time to help repair drywall, flooring, windows, and trim. I don't know how many of you have done drywall in the past, but after 10-15 minutes, mudding and sanding drywall quickly loses its

appeal. So, this group of 10 started to sing beautiful 4-part harmony hymns while we sanded to make the time pass a little quicker. One of the homeowners walked by and heard us singing. His wife had terminal cancer, so in addition to the flood recovery, he was pretty down emotionally. He approached our Project Director and asked if we could come by his house at the end of the day and sing for his wife. Later in the day after we had all cleaned up, we headed over to their house and crowded 25 people into their living room and sang come thou fount and how great thou art, and a few others. We weren't building houses that evening, and it didn't take long to sing those songs, but it was a humbling experience to witness love being shared through song. I can't say that I have personally experienced God's presence, but I have to imagine that it would be pretty close to that evening.

I could also share the story of Steve Campbell, one of our volunteer drivers for MDS. He retired early and was looking for something to do, so he called MDS and offered his driving ability since he didn't know how to build a house, but he knew vehicles backwards and forwards. If we fast forward, today he has been driving consistently for MDS for the last 10-15 years and has built special relationships with Amish in Lancaster County, and has taken on a role of coordinating volunteers from all over the US to move vehicles to and from project locations. One time he and 2 other drivers took 3 vehicles from Lancaster to Eastern Ohio, picked up 4 drivers, continued to Goshen, picked up 2 more drivers, and then they all went to Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to close up our project where we have been rebuilding and repairing homes since the fall of 2016. They took some pickups, tool trailers, shower trailers, and bunk trailers to our warehouse in Columbus, MS and then had to get people back to Indiana, Ohio, and PA. I asked him why he does it, and he responded "It's the people. I've never been around so many people that care so much and want to go such good work with the highest integrity. I may not know how to swing a hammer, but it's a way that I can clearly support the mission of MDS."

If we circle back to the Mark text, there seems to be an emphasis on virtues of giving not just what you can, but going "all in" not knowing what the consequences might be. On a personal confession, I can relate more to Zacchaeus the tax collector or to the Israelites who gathered excess Manna during the Exodus, only to have it go bad. They didn't trust God to provide, and it took a meal with Jesus for Zacchaeus to learn the joy of giving. I don't think I'll be eating lunch with Jesus anytime soon, so I am continuing to look for alternative ways to give of my time, energy, and resources. I wrestle with a lot of theological questions, and I am grateful for the opportunities that Assembly provides to wrestle with these questions of doubt and biblical interpretation. However, throughout my studies and various vocations, service has been consistent model for living out my faith in a tangible way.

In conclusion, MDS started out as just a small Sunday school class discussion around service. However, in 2019 we had 5,569 volunteers build 68 new homes, complete 313 repairs, cleaned up 352 properties, and built 5 bridges. This year in a Covid-19 environment, we are testing out a pilot program where we will build a house for miss Billie Paxton in 2 halves in Ohio and then ship it to West Virginia, so that volunteers don't have to travel for a week to the community that was flooded in 2016. When the flood happened, Billy was in the process of evacuating when she remembered her cat and bunny. When she retrieved the bunny, the water was already at her knees. Fortunately, she made the wise decision to end the search early even though she didn't find the cat because at that point the water was up to her waist. I have

photos of the water all the way up to the eave of the house. She's been either living with her brother or in an apartment for the last 4 years and is anxious to get back home. The Methodist Church (UMCOR), just committed \$50,000 of donations to fund the building materials, and with the money Billie received from FEMA, we should have enough to cover all the material costs. We staked out the house on the property on Friday, and we anticipate the house will be completed by September. With the An MDS volunteer can be a driver, a quilter, a phone caller, a cook, a bookkeeper, and a listener. Of course, construction skills are welcomed as well. We do anticipate opening up at around 70% capacity this fall if we can do it safely in Marianna Florida, Texas, California, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Dayton Ohio, and possibly Tennessee or even Midland Michigan. Local opportunities where volunteers can serve for a day are going to be the projects that open up first.

So, who is MDS? WE are MDS. Our grandparents, our children, and everyone between. Yes, we are a relatively small group here at Assembly. We won't fix everything, and we all have different gifts. But we can pick up where others left off and prepare the way for more people to continue what we start. Along the way we will learn to know each other in new ways, get pushed outside of our comfort zone, learn new skills, and build new friendships. I have one last quick story.

In the fall of 2017 after Hurricane Irma we were cutting up trees during the Early Response phase. That week there was an 80 year old woman from Calgary Alberta who loved to run the chainsaw, an Amish man from Pennsylvania, a Military Vet who didn't know what a Mennonite was, and two conservative Mennonites from Virginia all serving together. After supper, they would have amazing conversations about what service means to them. I don't know much, but I do believe that sometimes church is best experienced with a little a bar oil or dirt on our brow. What a powerful testimony.

We have determined that we have the ability, now we have to ask ourselves "We see the need, now how will we respond?"