

Let us pray... Eternal God, gather your Spirit in this place, and open our hearts to love.... Guide our journey together, with you at the center. Amen.

This past Sunday, St. John had a youth outing at Days-Bowl-A-Dome. I have never been much of a bowler, nor have I ever been a good bowler, and I have never taken the time to become a better bowler.

So, it should come as no surprise that my first ball ended up in the gutter... And then... my second ball did too...

Clearly, I did not have high expectations for myself...

And then the two kind hearted youth I was bowling with said, Pastor Maggie, would you like to have the bumpers on?

At first, I said no, and then they said, well, we have our bumpers on... And so, I thought well, then why not? Everyone can use a little help sometimes.

And as much as the bumpers did help from time to time, even with them up, I still had the lowest score of everyone on my lane...

But had I not had my bumpers on, I'm guessing my score would have been even worse...

Because everyone does need a little help sometimes and there is nothing wrong with that... And some situations are more dire than having your bumpers on while you bowl.

Case in point, the paralyzed man in our gospel today... His very livelihood depended on others.

And he was fortunate to be surrounded by a group of people who loved him and took good care of him.

In fact, he was so loved that our Gospel reveals a truly surreal story...

After the paralytics' friends discovered Jesus was sharing the word of God from inside a house, they went to the paralytic, put him on a mat and carried him all the way there just so he could meet Jesus.

And when they arrived, it was impossible to get close to Jesus because of all the people...

And yet, they didn't give up... Instead, they found a way to the roof, and then removed the roof by digging through it and tearing it apart, just so they could lower their friend down to Jesus.

And when they did this, the first thing Jesus commented on, was the faith of the paralytics' friends.

And when it comes to faith, we often talk about it in terms of our faith in God...

But there is another popular phrase that often gets tossed around in regards to faith... Faith in humanity...

And I wonder if this concept, is also rooted in God...

Since we have faith in God, does that mean, God has faith in us???

Faith that we are going to do the right thing for our neighbors?

Afterall, that is what Jesus says in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

A faith statement that is central to Christianity and is also important to the community of St. John.

In fact, this is clearly stated on St. John's website, it reads...

"We are a community of faith centered in the words of Jesus from John 15:12, 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

Jesus loves us, so that we can love others in return. Simple advice, yet not so easy to put into daily practice. We warmly invite you to join us as we embrace life and God's call to love others together."

And I have seen these words from St. John's website lived out in many different ways... One example, one that you all can relate to, has been during this season of Lent...

You have opened your kitchen and your fellowship hall for the Lenten Dinners. Generously providing food, nourishment, and fellowship.

From the quilting group who takes the time to set up the tables each week, to the help of the confirmation students, to the help of the many cooks and volunteers.

You have created a place that is inviting to all people, even those who are not members of St. John.

Which has made an impact on others, because tonight's dinner was provided by many who are not even members of St. John, but felt called to share their generosity and time with this community of faith that has welcomed them in.

And at every dinner, it always amazes me, so many people bring something extra to share... A salad, or a dessert, or something else...

Showing up to pitch in wherever it is needed and caring for one another.

And these Lenten Dinners are just one example of caring for each other.

As part of our call as a community of faith is not only to invite people in, but to go out into the community and provide neighborly love and support.

From volunteering, to fundraising, to speaking out against injustices, there are endless ways to love and support our neighbors.

Because everyone needs a little help sometimes.

Just like the paralytic needed help from multiple people, in order for him to get to Jesus...

He placed his faith in his friends, and Jesus recognized the faith in all of them.

And this is the kind of faith we need in each other, especially in our weary and divided world... A place where many have lost their faith in humanity.

Now, more than ever, we are called to restore this faith, by living out our call to love others... Knowing God has faith in us to do just that.

And sometimes this might be easy... Like extending an invitation to someone, just like the kids did for me when they offered to flip a switch and put up a bumper up on the bowling alley.

An invitation may be all it takes to offer help, grace, support, and love.

And other times this may be a challenge, and it might require true grit, like digging through a roof.

Because being in community with our neighbors can be complicated and messy... And yet, it is beautiful, and it is worth it.

When we love others, like Jesus loves us, the world becomes a better place. A world where God's love and grace is lived out. A world that God has faith in...

This Lent may we learn what it looks like to live faithfully into this world, loving others how Jesus loves us... Amen.