Today we kick off our Stewardship Campaign 2023, “God of Wonders!” The idea of this theme reflects the many stories in the Bible and our lives where we see God moving in amazing ways. We believe that when we welcome God into our lives, listen to God’s wisdom, and live by it, wonderful things happen to us and those around us.

For example, in the Bible, we read stories of how God healed the sick and saved the innocent miraculously. We read stories of how against all odds, the people of God overcame obstacles and enemies. In none of these stories the people were passively waiting on God to do something. Instead, they listened, believed, and acted on their faith. The wonders of God became a tangible blessing because people got involved in what God was doing.

One of the tenets of our faith and vows we make when we join a United Methodist congregation is to give ourselves to serve where there is a need or an opportunity to help. Service is at the core of what defines the character of a disciple of Jesus and how God does wonders through us. Consider what Jesus said plainly, referring to himself and us,

“You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant… just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” Matthew 20: 25-38

Jesus, the Son of Man, modeled a life of service and is inviting us to do likewise. We need to understand and talk about service as a gift. No one can be fulfilled without serving others; there is no progress if people are unwilling to help each other.

Think of a time when you did a selfless act of service for someone else: opening the door for somebody, picking up trash in your community, helping at a food bank, or volunteering at your kids’ schools. How did that make you feel? The feeling is a combination of happiness, adrenaline, and self-fulfillment. Right?

Now imagine when we serve as an act of faith too. For example, over the years, I have witnessed how the church thrives and people experience a renewed life when people offer themselves to bless others. As a result, people overcome unhealthy habits, families heal and come together, young people find honest paths for their lives, and children grow in healthy communities. This kind of service is not just about feelings but purpose with lasting benefits.

Can you see the picture here? Acting on our faith by coming together and serving one another builds healthy and strong communities. These wonders of God happen when we keep our faith and practice it well. These blessings are not a product of luck but a fruit of our actions out of our faith. When we act on our faith, our lives are changed and rearranged, making things better for us, those in our lives, and around us.

So, when we talk about God doing wonders in relation to stewardship and service, we are talking about our responsibility to manage our faith, all of it, how we keep and practice it in our relationships and service to others.

With this framework, the subject of today’s message is about how acting on our faith to serve others leads to wonders. Let’s look at Galatians 6:9-10,

“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith.”

This letter to the Galatians was written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in Galatia as an encouragement to remain faithful. People were distracted, fighting over doctrine issues, and discouraged due to disagreements. They were getting tired and unwilling to help one another anymore because they lost sight of their faith.

To this, Paul provided clarity to dispel the false teachings that were causing division and encouraged them to do what was right for each other by reminding them that they are a part of something greater than themselves: the family of God.

When he said, “let us not grow weary in doing what is right” and “let us work for the good of all,” he acknowledged we can get tired of serving, but he was also making clear that the best witness of our faith is how we treat and serve each other, “work for the good of all.”

Why was this happening to them and why does it happen to us too, that is, getting tired of “doing what is right” and “good for all”? Why do we find it so tiresome to serve sometimes? Because we talk more about “What we do” than “Why we do it.” That is why we get weary. It is not enough to know what to do but why we do it. The “Why” gives us passion and purpose in the “What” we do. If we know our “Why,” that is when we go above and beyond what is asked of us. That is when wonderful things happen.

There is a story in the Bible about a queen who, through her service, accomplished a tremendous victory for her people, but not until she realized the “Why.” Her name is Esther. This story is found in the Hebrew Scriptures in the book that has her name: Esther. Here is her story.

Esther was a young Jew lady who became the queen to the king of Persia. The king personally chose her. “The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him” (2:17).

Esther had an uncle who was also her guardian—Mordecai. One day, Mordecai refused to bow down and pay homage to Haman, a high official of the king. This infuriated Hamman, who plotted to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews in the kingdom. He convinced the king that the Jews refused to obey the king’s commands and followed only their own laws and traditions. So the king issued a decree calling for the Jews’ annihilation.

Soon enough, Mordecai informed queen Esther of the king’s order to kill the Jews and asked her to go before the king to plead for her people, but she feared being put to death because Persian law prohibited anyone from approaching the king without first being called.

Mordecai heard of Esther’s fears and replied to her,

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther knew “What” she needed to do to stop the king from killing her people but was afraid for her life too. But when Mordecai said to her, “You were appointed to be where you are right now to save your people,” she realized the “Why” she needed to do it: To save her people. She then acted faithfully, and a wonderful thing happened: her people were saved.

Esther is one example among many. Every story in the Bible about wonderful things happening involved people offering themselves to serve selflessly. Moses served to free God’s people. King David served to defend God’s people. The prophet Elisha served to defeat false gods and an evil monarchy. Every one of them was afraid and hesitant at first, but then they understood why they were called to serve just like Esther did.

This story teaches us how wonderful things happen when we act on our faith but also that there are many wonderful things that will never happen if we don’t. So many blessings are lost when we fail to serve. But every time we say “yes” to God to serve, we become channels of blessings, just like Esther.

So, why do we serve? We serve because we know how much God loves us, not because we have to do it or to help us gain favor from God. We serve because we are grateful for everything God has done for us. We serve because we want to be a part of the wonderful things God is doing to reconcile, heal, and save all the people on earth. We serve because we want to pass the blessing unto others. We serve because we want people to know Jesus as we do. We serve because we want our children to know God and become faithful disciples of Jesus as they grow. We serve to make this world better for our people and everyone else. And we serve because our lives express God’s grace in this world. Through our service, we reflect the love and compassion of God to all people.

I know that sometimes we are not finding purpose and fulfillment in our jobs or anything else we may do, but when we serve, we find our place and purpose in this life. But it only happens if we act on our faith. Offering ourselves in service is a choice we make where our gifts and passion meet to accomplish something meaningful and life-giving. Think of our church, for example. If you want to be a part of a dynamic and thriving church, then make it happen by serving, and let’s build together a community where we are safe and our people are blessed.

So, where do you see a need? How would you serve here at New World UMC or your kids’ school, for example? Are you willing to choose to serve and build a blessed community?

Look at one of our own William Robertson (picture). He is not paid for this; no one asked him to do it either. Instead, he sees a need and acts to provide for it. There are many like him in this congregation. Many of you go above and beyond in giving your time and resources to make church happen and make things better. Imagine how many more wonderful things could happen to our families, church, and community if more of us served each other in such a manner.

A life of service is a life with purpose because it is not about trying to get something out of what we do but giving something out where it is needed. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. What is your something?

Here is the invitation and good news: Do not grow weary in serving. Your efforts are a much-needed part of the work of what God is doing in the world. Sometimes, you may not see it, but God makes wonderful things happen through your service.

This is my prayer for you and all of us: May you be a great friend, an outstanding parent, an amazing spouse, and a good person who serves God and others. And during that time of service in this life, may people think of you: He/she brought joy, love, and fulfillment to many people. Amen.