

### Never Not Working

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12.*

As some of you know, I’m a dedicated Steelers’ fan. Growing up just outside of Pittsburgh, Steelers’ football is in my blood. When I met my wife, Madeline, I learned that she is a dedicated Kansas City fan. To be clear, she is more a fan of the actual city and by extension anything that promotes that city; so yes, even a pro football team, like the Kansas City Chiefs. But, I knew early on that my passion for the Steelers and her passion for Kansas City would collide. Lately, when we’re strictly talking football, those collisions have completely gone in her favor and sadly it’s not even been close.

While I’m hopeful that the Steelers can once again become constant contenders – especially so that my favorite team has a shot at winning my son’s allegiance someday – there is one Steelers’, Chiefs’, moment that has been a win for my whole family. It’s those Head & Shoulders shampoo commercials with Patrick Mahomes, the Chiefs’ current star quarterback, and Troy Polamalu a former defensive star for the Pittsburgh Steelers. If you’re not familiar with these commercials, let me share one with you now.

“Never not working.” The truth is, we all feel like we’re never not working. Maybe it’s in our job. Perhaps it’s with our family, and the constant caregiving for parents, kids, grandkids, great-grandkids, or likely some combination of all of those! We might also feel this way with our health or home; constantly having to do something just to keep up! No doubt, we’re feeling it with school, as teachers and students alike are counting down the days to summer when the workload will finally change for a little while. The constant work leads us to seek and long for moments when we’re finished and can go on auto-pilot for a while.

The same can be said for our spiritual lives. We think that if we reach a certain point in our spiritual journey we can cross faith off our list and move on to the next challenge in life. Today, is one of those days where this temptation becomes very clear. Today, is confirmation Sunday at Emmanuel and 25 young men and women from our congregation have reached an exciting milestone in their faith journey. Yet confirmation all too often gets treated like graduation and I’m sure they are tempted to think this way on this special day and in the days and weeks to come as well.

Honestly, they’re not alone! Many of us have been in their shoes. When our confirmation day came, it likely was the beginning of a fade from faith and connection to the Church that often went on longer than we’d like to admit. Confirmation, this milestone of faith, leads us to lock-in auto-pilot down a course that leads farther from this moment than we realize. While I highlight confirmation on this weekend, there are many other moments that can move us into auto-pilot mode as well. Baptisms and weddings, Christmas and Easter; we also use these occasions to serve as an inoculation for fading faith instead of seeking regular, ongoing growth in God’s promises.

As nice it as it sounds to be finished with faith, to be finished with all those “churchy requirements” and switch into spiritual auto-pilot, this shift is also extremely dangerous to our faith life. Switching to auto-pilot for faith, leads us to disengage. And when we disengage, we stop listening. When stop listening, we cut ourselves off from what continues to sustain and grow our faith. When faith is cutoff from its life source, it becomes dormant to the point of dying away.

The Bible has numerous accounts of when God’s people stopped listening. Even today’s Gospel reading shows us how Jesus’ own disciples, even after multiple years of being with Jesus, didn’t listen. Thomas, the disciple who early on had said that the disciples should all follow Jesus to His death, now questions where Jesus is going and the way to get there. Philip, in that same moment completely misses Jesus’ point about His relationship with the Father and so he asks to be shown God

the Father. Here, in these final moments of Jesus' earthly ministry, on the very night when Jesus would be betrayed, His disciples revealed that they were on auto-pilot, not fully listening to their Lord and Savior.

Yet, even as Jesus' disciples revealed their poor listening skills – in His darkest moments no less – He continued to care for them. He answered their questions. He told Thomas that He was the way, the truth and the life. He told Philip that by seeing Him, he had seen the Father. Although, He was about to die, Jesus didn't give up on His disciples. He wasn't going to let their faith die. He continued to feed their faith, to proclaim promises to them – promises of hope and purpose that He was going to keep.

So later that same evening, Jesus followed through with His promises. He was betrayed and arrested by a disciple who listened to his greed more than to Him. He was abandoned by the other disciples who failed to hear His words from that final dinner over the noise of their own fear. He was condemned to death and crucified by His own people and Jesus even endured being forsaken by God the Father so that His saving purpose would be fulfilled.

Through this darkest moment in human history, Jesus delivered the greatest promises of hope and purpose for this life. Resurrected and glorified, He returned to Philip and His other disciples assuring them that in seeing Him, they had seen the Father. He showed Thomas His pierced hands and side so that Thomas might actually feel by touch that He was the way, truth and life. Then, Jesus sent these disciples out to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth so that He might do even greater works through them leading many others to faith.

Jesus was never not working for His disciples then, and He is never not working for His disciples today. And that includes you and me! That includes the 25 young men and women we recognize especially on this, their confirmation day. Even though this milestone has come in their faith journey, it isn't the end! God is not done working in their lives! This is just the cornerstone of the work that He is going to continue to do throughout the rest of their lives. This isn't a moment for us to switch to auto-pilot and shut off our ears! No, this is a moment for us to hear all the more clearly that God is never not working in our lives! Today is not the end of God's work in our lives, it is a celebration of His ongoing work in us until He returns to take us to be where He is.

Last week during communion, I had the opportunity to bless several of these confirmands for the last time. For these blessings, Pastor Eggold and I use different phrases that center around Jesus' love for them and the reminder that God is at work in their lives. Today, that message doesn't change! While they won't be receiving a blessing from us as they come forward for communion, they will be receiving an even greater blessing in the promise that God is never not working in their lives as they receive Christ' body and blood for their forgiveness, life, and salvation. And then they too will be sent out into their daily lives with Christ in them at work to produce even greater works through them.

God is never not working for us. He will continually show up to remind us of this truth. Even in our darkest moments, He is still at work for us. Yes, our God, who was at work for us in that darkest moment in human history upon the cross continues to be at work for us even now. So, today, and in the future, may we all continue to seek out His gifts, His Word and Sacraments, given to His Church so that this promise might be personally delivered into our lives that He is never not working for us. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan