

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

October 4, 2026 *"What Can I Do? Be Willing to Get Dirty"*

I Intro.

We're flying through the first part of fall, and we're starting a new series. There's a lot going on at NCC and you'll want to keep up with everything that's happening. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attendees. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Sunday.

I want to tell you a true story. No names will be mentioned...to protect...the guilty. When I was a youth minister two churches ago, we had a Wednesday night program called L.I.F.E. that attracted A LOT of kids from all over. And we really started attracting some pretty tough youth. We even had to have the police have a presence during this program. I had a parent from the church I was employed at tell me. *"My kids have to go to school with kids like this, they shouldn't have to go to church with kids like this too."* And...our youngest son was best friends with one of their kids. Our L.I.F.E. ministry wasn't a reflection of me. It was the heart and passion of all the people who volunteered to just love on teens. No matter what kind of kids they were. We even had older adults, 70-80 year olds, who wanted to come and grandparent these kids. They brought homemade baked goods. We had created a safe third space. Now, I have a mean and vengeful side, so, I made sure we reached out to even more kids like that. Just so you know...connecting with people far from God feeds me.

A. Introduce new series. Hold onto that understanding, and we'll come back to this specific idea. Because this is the first step in the new series we're starting today. *"What can I do?"* Let me give it some context. We're going to backpeddle a bit. I want it to connect with what you may be feeling and thinking about our world and just life in general. I know when you see and hear everything that's going on around you. Crime, (even though it's dropping), price of things, (our Food Pantry struggling to get food), trouble in the schools, kids and adults who seem to be directionless, corrupt politicians, general chaos in society, and more. Sometimes, or most of the time, it's easy to lose heart and just give up. It feels like all of the world's problems are too big, there are so many, and there seems to be new and different problems and issues everyday.

We watch the news, hear stuff, read, and ask the question; *"What can I do?"* And this question isn't always only the vastness of the problems. It often is how tiny, powerless we feel against everything going on in the world. All of the things going on in the world, we just feel overwhelmed. Not only do WE feel small and insignificant. We don't have any leverage, control, power, or authority to even make a dent in all of the problems we see around us. **Do you feel like this?**

So, the title of this series: “**What can I do?**” Is for when you feel powerless. Like you can’t make any difference in your little world, let alone the whole world. You want to have hope. You believe in the power of action. But you don’t know what those things are you can do. And even if you had a few ideas, you don’t know where to begin. Let us help you discover a few things you can do. But we have to start where the story of the gospels begin, and in my first story. The church word for today’s idea is ‘incarnation’. Meeting people where they are. We’re calling it: **“Be willing to get dirty.”**

Going to give a little bit of a preface. I want to be very careful about the language I use for this first Sunday of this series.

The problem of labeling. (I feel we need to start here and build an understanding) Because labeling people is used in our scripture passage, we need to address how easy it is for us to slide into the same descriptions and identifications that our world uses to label people. This shouldn’t be a political conversation, but unfortunately our world has become that way. The quickest path to justify mistreatment of others is to give them a dehumanizing label. We call them: Illegals, savages, pagans, deplorables, the masses, swarms, animals, vermin, in war time we call non military deaths- ‘collateral’. They’re not real people. They’re just NPC’s. Just uncontrollable damage. Like accidentally blowing up a car. Or we describe them in demeaning, undignifying, dehumanizing ways. We make up lies about them. Where they’re from. What they eat. What they wear. What they smell like. How they wear their hair.

I want to establish a relatable context between the scripture passage and us. I feel I need to give some comparison background information, so we can see the pattern all through history that wants to create castes of people. I read Isabella Wilkerson’s book. **“Caste”** about how societies built a structure of hierarchy of value of different peoples. It’s so they can support their extractive economic system by ‘casting’ certain people groups as less than. It was eye-opening. This is exactly what we’ll be facing in our scripture today. History we need to know, that will give us something to hold onto. In Hitler’s *“Mein Kampf”*, and the 1935 *“Nuremberg Laws”*, the Nazi regime established specific distinctions between worthy peoples and unworthy peoples. Hitler studied American practiced and legalized racism, and formed their government around how the U.S. carried out overt acts of racism. He praised the westward expansion of settlers wiping out indigenous people. Hitler admired how the U.S. lifted up certain ancestry heritage, (whiteness) that was used to label those not of white Western European heritage as polluting the pureness of the white race. Anyone that didn’t fit their understanding of what it meant to be purely German, were to be rounded up and detained or deported. Hitler held non-whites in detention centers for 10 years before he started mass executions. Concentration camps were first formed solely for the purpose of rounding up and detaining non-white labeled people. Hitler adopted America’s strict immigration system favoring white Europeans. Hitler also studied our Jim Crow laws and segregation, to see how we discriminated against non-whites openly. And how we wrote that overt discrimination into law. We have to face the truth that much of Hitler’s actions came from studying the U.S. All of this was to reinforce that certain ethnicities, and people groups, had a ‘manifest destiny’, ‘divine design’ for privilege, status. European whites were just more deserving. Then there were just certain people groups that didn’t belong, were labeled a threat to the majority group’s way of life, and didn’t deserve what the majority group deserved.

Basically we’re saying they’re; *“not like us”*. This may be cool in a beef between two rappers. But not in treatment of others. I want us to be painfully aware how prevalent this has been all through history,

so we can see it now. This is why Jesus was hung on a cross. It was because he wasn't Roman. The first step we have to take, the hurdle we have to overcome, in wanting to make a difference, to have an impact in your world. We have to fight against the cultural flow to demonize and dehumanize others. To get caught up in labeling others as less worthy, human.

So, for this first Sunday of our series: ***"What can I do?"*** We have to be willing to get dirty. We're going to enter a story about Jesus running into the very same thing we've been talking about. We'll talk about what was said by those who label and judge. People who have created this world of strife and hate. How Jesus addressed what was said. And then we unpack what that teaches us as we're trying to answer the question: ***"What can I do?"*** in Jesus' world that was dealing with the very same things we are in our world. **Are you willing to get dirty?**

Be okay with getting dirty.

Matthew 9:9-13. *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.*

Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?"

When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do."¹³ Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

What does this passage tell us about our primary first question? "What can I do?"

1. Fight the temptation of protecting religious or cultural purity. This is a complicated truth. This first step has to begin with each of us. There is a dark pride that can seed and grow inside of us, if we're not careful, intensely aware, purity will tell us we are better than others. This isn't saying, don't live a righteous life. We are called to live a life that reflects all of who Jesus is. This is saying, our calling is not to protect ourselves from getting dirty. And this purity culture is so prevalent in our society today. To fight against this means we go where others are, eating at their table, etc. This also means don't expect others to be cleaned up first. The desire, temptation towards purity ALWAYS creates distance. You're asking what you can do to make a difference. **What can you do?**

Learn to grow a faith and relationship with God powerful enough to go anywhere, and be with anyone.

2. Be willing to stand against the demonization and dehumanization of others. This is huge and significant. Doing this requires you to grow in humility that your righteousness is given to you. You did NOT earn or inherit it. Standing against the demonization and dehumanization of others means crossing some boundaries that people obsessed with purity have artificially drawn. *"Those people are not like us."* This may mean standing on the other side with others, even if family and friends use their beliefs to dehumanize others. This is accepting the cost of associating with people who have been labeled and unworthy, undeserving, you WILL be judged for. You are judged because you are with others...without judging them. Judging, labeling, deciding 'who's in and who's out' is what you're

challenging. Getting dirty, standing with others, means being willing to receive the judgment that others would direct towards the people you're with. "WHY?" Because getting dirty means being with others BEFORE they change. It means being with others BEFORE they are who you think they need to be. It means being with others who are who they are. You're asking how you can make a difference. What can you do? Keep in the front of your mind. Whenever we draw a line between who's in and who's out, Jesus is ALWAYS on the other side of that line.

Move to the other side of the line when people draw lines.

3. Getting dirty means having your personal "Why". You HAVE TO have something inside of you that knows getting dirty is your calling. Jesus had his "Why".

"When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do."

Jesus had his reason to get dirty. To walk over the line the Pharisees drew. Those people had real needs that he could meet with kindness and compassion. Without a reason that has deep meaning FOR YOU, you're just going to be going through the motions because it's expected of you. And people will notice your lack of sincerity. You want to make a difference. **What can you do?**

Have a life-changing relationship with Jesus. There's no question in your mind, you're fully aware why you're willing to get dirty. For the work of Jesus.

III Challenge.

Jesus did the perfect loving, compassionate jujitsu move. He reframed the entire conversation with the Pharisees. People aren't all the labels we throw at people who are different than we are. He refused to use any language that dehumanized others. He saw others we label as unworthy, as people who just needed to be seen and loved. Jesus was willing to get dirty. This is how you make a difference. This is a real thing you can do. You don't have to push to pass laws, tear down systems of injustice, take down 'the man'. You don't have to have all the answers, or have figured out things yourself. This was the passage Jesus was quoting in this

Hosea 6:6. *I want you to show love,^[b] not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.*

[b] mercy

YOU ARE NOT POWERLESS! YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

What can you do?

How can you make an impact in our world?

BE WILLING TO GET DIRTY! SHOW LOVE!

What's the cliché saying:

"Don't go to church...BE the church." This is the first step.

And another cliché. ***"Think globally...act locally."*** Don't let the size and scope of all the issues in the world freeze you or grow this feeling of helplessness in you. Jesus did not venture very far outside of where he grew up. He was willing to get dirty in the places he was.

Do ONLY what you can do...where you can do it. Even if you get dirty doing it.