

“Dirty Jobs”

Luke 2:8-20

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This show premiered with three pilot episodes in November, 2003. It returned as a series on July 26, 2005 and takes reality television to a new low, but in an acceptable way.

Dirty Jobs airs on the Discovery Channel and Mike Rowe is the perfect host. He performs difficult, strange and/or messy occupational duties alongside professional workers. His sharp, sarcastic, self-deprecating wit makes the show even more entertaining.

He begins each show by saying, “My name is Mike Rowe and this is my job. I explore the country looking for people who aren’t afraid to get dirty-hard working men and women who earn an honest living doing the kinds of jobs that make civilized life possible for the rest of us. Now...get ready to get dirty.”

Each week he takes the audience on a dirty adventure inspecting sewers, capturing snakes, cleaning out pig pens, collecting garbage, mining underground coal, diving for golf balls in alligator infested waters, cleaning skulls, processing smelly seafood in a fish factory or combing creek bottoms looking for edible wildlife. He is constantly putting his hands in places that are often curious, sometimes dangerous and always dirty. He does it because he wants to pay tribute to America’s unsung heroes like his dad, who was a pig farmer.

Had Rowe lived in Jesus’ day, he might have worked alongside shepherds. Nothing about their job was glamorous. Plenty, however, was dirty, risky and unappealing. Taking care of sheep was a hard and demanding task.

So dirty was a shepherd’s job that most priests looked upon shepherds with contempt. They would have nothing to do with them, considering them unclean and uncouth.

This made the angel’s visit to the shepherds and their inclusion in the birth narrative even more remarkable. Instead of announcing the birth of Jesus to Herod in the palace or the priests in the temple, the angel went at night to shepherds on the hillside as they were protecting their flocks. The lowliest among them were guided to the manger where Jesus was born and selected to announce his birth.

Why did Luke include the shepherds in his birth narrative? Why did he give them such a prominent place in the Christmas story? Perhaps he did so for the same reason he told us about commoners like Mary and Joseph. **This was Luke’s way of informing his readers that in God’s eyes, everyone is important, all people are loved and everyone deserves a seat at the table where needs are discussed and addressed, including the least, the lost and the last.** Luke wanted his readers to know that Jesus came to minister to everyone and pursue justice for all people, including common folk like carpenters and shepherds.

Jesus certainly made this clear the first time he spoke in his hometown synagogue after his baptism. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened upon him and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ ” Luke 4:18-21.

This sends a clear message to those of us who call Jesus Lord. If we are going to be the presence of Christ in a broken and wounded world, we, too, must pursue justice for all people and find a seat at the table of the world’s resources for everyone. No child or adult must be ignored or left behind. No one is insignificant or unimportant. Our greatest commodity is hope and our calling is to make it visible, especially to the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized.

“We are called to be persons who embody hope for one another. We have to be each other’s partners in hope,” writes theologian Paul Waddell.

I like that phrase, “partners in hope.” Luke was a partner. The shepherds were, too. Are you?

I think there was another reason Luke told us about the shepherds. **This was his way of helping us to understand that God’s word would be heard by the humble.**

During Advent this year, my messages have focused upon the characters in the birth narratives that were visited by angels and given messages from God. The theme has been, “Do You Hear What I Hear?”

I began with Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, followed by Joseph and Mary. This week, the shepherds are center stage.

What do all four have in common? They were simple, ordinary, humble and often overlooked folk. If they had auditioned for a part in the story, chances are none would have been chosen. However, each played a significant role and the story would not have been complete or even possible without each one.

How were they chosen? They heard the word of God and responded as trusting servants. How were they able to hear the voice of God? They were humble enough to listen.

Teachers will tell you that one of the most important characteristics of an excellent student is that he or she must be teachable. Coaches say the same about athletes that perform well.

Good students approach a classroom with an eagerness to listen and learn. They leave their egos at the door and open their hearts and minds to new understandings. They are humble and expectant. They are a teacher’s dream.

Humble and expectant people are God’s dream, too. These are the people that He can communicate with, teach, shape and mold. These are the disciples that He can help, bless and use.

Perhaps you have come to church this morning yearning to hear a word from the Lord. You are confused, empty, angry, scared, worried, guilty, grieving or despondent. You are in need of guidance, fulfillment, strength, courage, confidence, forgiveness, comfort, hope or peace.

How can you receive a word of hope? The best advice I can give you is to become a good student. Humble yourself before God and acknowledge your need. Tell Him what is in your heart and on your mind. Approach Him with a spirit of humility and expectancy. Listen and learn. Trust and obey.

This is what Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds did. You can, too. Let me encourage you to begin right now as we bow and pray.