

**Series:** Real Life, Real Faith  
**Title:** Rolled Up Sleeves  
**Text:** Matthew 25: 34 -36, 40

Avery Hairston and friends from NY City had a bright idea. In 2006 these teenagers launched Relight NY. Using donations from individuals and corporations, the teens buy compact fluorescent light bulbs, which use less electricity and last longer than regular bulbs. Then they scout out residents of low-income housing projects who need the help. So far they have delivered 21,000 bulbs. These students are rolling up their sleeves.

Hal Colston left his food service executive job to do something that would make a difference in the lives of others. He launched “Good News Garage” a non-profit organization that rebuilds donated cars and gives them away to low-income residents in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Hal says, “If you can’t get there, nothing happens. You can’t get a job or be part of the community.” The majority of these car recipients rely less on government support and 83 % claim that having a car makes holding down a job possible. Rolled-up sleeves proclaim Good News.

Avery and Hal teach me that we declare Christ’s love with our mouths, but we demonstrate it with our muscle. In a world that is hungry for a little kindness, the Lord has provided His church, and kindness is our stock-in-trade. When we roll up our sleeves, we hold our Lord up to a needy world.

So, what are some specific ways we can roll up our sleeves, use our muscles, and sweat out some kindness for Jesus' sake? Follow Avery and Hal's example: Find a need, fill a need. Ask God to show you a specific need and then to empower you to meet that need.

Do you know someone undergoing chemotherapy who could use a meal brought in one day of the treatment? Does a single mother in your neighborhood need help with lawn mowing or yard work? Or visiting a nursing home to chat with the elderly, pray with the lonely, and perhaps organize visits by children's choirs or choral groups? What about volunteering to teach a children's Sunday School or Kid's Stuff/Music class?

In a parable Jesus stressed the priority of the rolled up sleeves. He describes a time when the Son of Man had gathered up the nations. He says to those on his right, *"Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."* Those on his right asked, *"Lord when did we do these things for You? And the Lord's replied, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers and sisters, you did it to me.'*" (Matthew 25:34-36, 40) We can all roll up our sleeves, pitch in and help out, and become the hands of Jesus, so that others might discover the heart of Jesus. This is real life, real faith.

Debbie Roth  
Testimony  
April 20, 2008

Good morning! I stood in this pulpit for the first time in January of 2007 and shared a message God had placed on my heart. At that time, I was pretty terrified and didn't really enjoy the experience all that much. It is not a place that I looked forward to returning. But God has been working on me and I asked Pastor Chris to allow me to share a little about my call into ministry. He graciously agreed so here I stand. Please pray with me.

After several years of resisting God's call into full time ministry, about 2 years ago I accepted that call and made a commitment to follow wherever God led. I began the candidacy process in the United Methodist Church. I met with an ordained elder for about 7 months to work through a process of discerning what God was calling me to do and the options available for pursuing that call. Through much prayer, study, discussion, prayer, assessing gifts and talents, and did I mention prayer, I discerned that God has called me to serve in the area of spiritual formation and discipleship. I have continued in the candidacy process with Pastor Chris as my mentor and I began the Masters of Spiritual Formation and Leadership program at

Spring Arbor University. It has been quite an experience to adjust to being back in college after 20 years. I am very excited about what I am learning and it has confirmed that I discerned my direction accurately as I have read about things I have done or believe. God has given me a passion for spiritual formation, for others and for myself. So, what exactly is spiritual formation? Spiritual Formation is the process of growing in your love relationship with God and becoming like Christ so that you can love and serve others.

**Colossians 3:10 *Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.***

Spiritual Formation is about inward transformation into Christlikeness, "allowing it to change our habits, feelings, and thoughts" (Bradley Holt, 23). It is where faith meets life - how our lives are changed because of living out our faith. Real faith - affecting our real lives. In *Biography as Theology*, James Wm McClendon argues that, "the truth of faith is made good in the living of it or not at all."

Spiritual Formation is all about relationships, our relationship with God and our relationship with others.

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12 a teacher of the law asks Jesus, "Which of the commands is most important?" Beginning with verse 29

**Jesus answered, "The most important command is this: 'Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength'. The second command is this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' There are no commands more important than these. "**

Learning and growing in doing these commands well is a process that could take me a lifetime. I have to begin by placing value on individual relationships. 1 John 4:20 says

***If people say, "I love God," but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen. (NCV)***

Randy Pausch was a professor at Carnegie Melon University. You may have seen him on TV or read the recent article about him in Parade. There is an academic tradition called a last lecture in which scholars hypothetically ask one another, "If you knew you were going to die, what would you say in your last lecture?" However, for Randy, it was not hypothetical because he knew he was dying of cancer and had only a couple months to live, which has now stretched to 8 months. One of the

things he talked about in his last lecture was the importance of valuing people over things. Randy recalls when he got his first brand new convertible. He monthly took his niece and nephew for the weekend to give his sister and her husband a break. As he drove up in his brand new car, his sister was explaining to the children that they needed to be very careful not to make a mess or get Uncle Randy's new car dirty. The children just started laughing hysterically, because behind his sister's back, Randy was opening a can of soda and emptying it on the back seat of his car. His sister ran over and asked, "What are you doing?" He responded that it was a thing, just a thing. Later, he was really glad that he had done that because on the way home his 8-year old nephew was sick and threw up all over the back seat of the car. Randy said, "I don't care how much value you get out of owning a nice shining pristine thing. It is not as good as I felt knowing that I made an 8 year old boy not feel guilty just because he had the flu."

Randy shows that love is valuing relationships.

If you look at Jesus' ministry, he repeatedly showed that he cared about individual people and relationships.

Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine at friend's wedding. Why? So that the friend would not be embarrassed for not having enough wine. After Jesus called the tax collector, Matthew to follow him, and Matthew

did, they gathered with friends to celebrate. The Gospels repeatedly tell us that Jesus "had compassion on them" and so he healed them. The story of the rich young ruler is told in three of the gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. I really like what Mark has to say as Jesus begins to answer the rich young rulers questions, ***Jesus, looking at the man, loved him...***

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. In each case, there was great rejoicing because the lost item was recovered.

There were 12 men in whom Jesus invested. He lived with them and taught them things others were unable to see. Toward the end of his earthly ministry Jesus said to these 12 disciples in John 15:15 ***I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.***

Jesus chose to spend his last supper with these friends. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 22 verse 15 Jesus says to the disciples, ***"I wanted very much to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer."***

Jesus knew that the disciples were going to desert him, he knew that Peter was going to deny him and he knew that Judas was going to betray him.

That must have caused amazing anguish and hurt for Jesus, but of all the

emotions that he felt, one overruled them all... his love. Because of his love, and because Jesus knew who he was, He had another lesson to teach them - one of serving others. So he got up from the table took off his outer garment and began to wash the disciples feet. I don't know how you picture that moment but I picture it as a last chance for Jesus to have some individual, intimate time with each disciple, even knowing what they were about to do. We have a glimpse of his conversation with Peter in John chapter 13, but what about the rest of them? What does he say to them as he washes their feet? Does he say anything or does he just look at them with love, like he did the rich young ruler? The one that truly amazes me, is Judas. Can you imagine, knowing what Jesus knew, being able to wash Judas' feet? I can't. But Jesus' love was more important than how he felt. His relationship with them was more important.

"Jesus shows a new way characterized by self-giving and self-sacrifice"  
(James L. Resseguie 81).

Then Jesus makes the biggest sacrifice of all. John 15:13 tells us, ***Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.***

Because Jesus cared about restoring our broken relationship with the Father, Jesus endured immense emotional and physical pain as he

sacrificed himself on the cross. All so the father could adopt us into his family, because God chose us, and it gives him great pleasure to do so.

How do you respond to that kind of intense love? I can only obey. Obey what Jesus commands, not because I have to, but out of love for Jesus. I choose to love God with all that I am and to love and serve others. 2 John 1:6 says, ***And love means living the way God commanded us to live. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is this: Live a life of love. (NCV)***

As people, we are spiritual beings, and we are being spiritually formed. The question is, how? Are we being formed into the image of Christ and living a life of love or are we being formed in some other image? How is our real faith being lived out in our real life?

God has called me to pursue ordination in the United Methodist Church as a deacon specializing in the area of spiritual formation. This call is something I cannot "not" follow. CS Lewis put it this way, "To follow the vocation does not mean happiness, but once it has been heard, there is no happiness for those who do not follow." It has not all been easy, there have been struggles as God stretches and molds me like the clay Pastor

Chris spoke about last week. But more importantly there is great joy in loving Christ by trying to do all that He asks.

Now as an act of obedience and a statement of what I hope and pray my life and my ministry will be about, I've asked Pastor Chris to allow me to wash his feet as a symbol of my commitment to love and serve God and others.