

ASP Commissioning 2016

Rev. Alida Ward

“Make me an Instrument...”

Here's something about me:

I hate clothes shopping. I mean, *really* hate.

I genuinely admire people -- men and women -- who have the patience and the self-awareness

to be able to go into a clothing store and to seek and find that article of clothing that is perfectly right for them.

For me, the first thing I find that fits,

I buy five of them.

"This shirt seems okay, I'll take it in red orange yellow blue and green."

Done.

My daughter Brigitta the other day said that growing up with me was like having a cartoon character mom. Same clothes every episode.

It's true. Marge Simpson and I had the right idea.

Same dress for twenty-five years.

What can I say. I really hate clothes shopping.

Here's where I love to shop: Home Depot.

I really, really love shopping for tools.

I will invent reasons for needing them.

I bought a jigsaw in January ago just to make one cut.

It was for a little swinging cat door, I thought our two feral cats might want to come in on cold nights.

They didn't. But -- I got a jigsaw out of it.

What I really love to get, though, is cool little tools that serve one particular purpose.

I mean, a big old Sawzall is awesome, because, well, it saws all.

But I like the kind of *interesting* little tools that people don't usually carry with them, the ones that you let you, on an ASP worksite, dazzle the folks around you by having just the right thing for a particular moment.

Like when you're with a crew and they're hanging Sheetrock on a wall and they can't figure out where to nail it so that they hit the wood, and you say "no worries, I've got my stud finder right here!" And of course, it's just kind of fun to say "stud finder."

Or someone says, "how are we supposed to keep this line of shingles straight?" and you say, well, of course, you need to snap a chalk line.

Or someone wants to make sure the overhang on the new roof is far enough out, so you say let's drop a plumb bob and see, and again, plumb bob is just a fun word to say.

And I got my line level, and my set of Allen wrenches...

I love this stuff.

Tools that let you say "ooh, I've got just exactly what you need right now."

There's a prayer, a famous prayer, that I'm going to have us say together in just a few minutes, as a whole lot of us prepare our hearts to serve in Appalachia. It's a prayer that Lia actually sang for us earlier in the service -- and here's the crazy thing: when I decided to have us say the prayer together, I had no idea she'd be singing it today, too.

It's the prayer of Saint Francis,

and the prayer says "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

And when we hear instrument, we always think music,

but it's not a prayer to be God's tuba,

it's a prayer to be God's awesome tool.

It's a prayer to God asking God to use *you* to get something done,

it's asking God to reach into the tool bag and say:

here is exactly what I need right now, this will do the trick.

It's a prayer for you to be what God needs right now,

to be who God needs right now.

Make **ME**, God, that which is needed right now,

use **me**, God, as a tool in the building of your kingdom.

Let *me* be the one you grab hold of, God, and say,

ah -- this is what I need, this'll do it.

Not too many of us are sawzalls.

We, most of us, have very particular gifts --
gifts of patience or energy, gifts of laughter or listening,
gifts of creativity or steadfastness, of compassion, of order.

But here's what IS for sure:

every one of us is what God needs for something that needs doing
for the kingdom -- which is to say, for peace. For hope. For love.

Because there is a ton of work to be done out there. A ton.

So then use me, St. Francis prayed.

Where there is hatred, use who I am to make love stronger.

Where there is despair, let me somehow be a way that people find hope.

Where there is darkness, shine through me. Shine through me, Lord.

In six days, a whole lot of us head South with one purpose:

to be used by God.

To be instruments of God's pace.

To place ourselves into God's hands in the building of God's kingdom
by the rebuilding of homes and lives.

And we do not know what we will be doing.

That's just not this year, though this year is like none other.

Every year we go, we don't know what's ahead.

We never know whose home will work on,

we don't know who God will put in our path.

We don't know if the most important we do all week will be repairing the foundation
of a home,

or building a foundation of hope for a mother in despair.

We don't know whether we'll be restoring a house to safety,

or restoring an old man's hope.

But we know we will be used;

we know that if we ask God to use us, we will be used,

each of us in all our particularities will be used.

I need Caroline, God will say --
Connor is just right for this, God will say.
Brian's who I was looking for;
Allie, that's who I need.

I said 'restoring an old man's hope.'
Several summers ago,
an elderly man in a home near Johnson City
was cared for by one of our work crews.
Cared for -- yes, his home was fixed,
but he was also listened to by kids who showed patience and interest,
and a couple of the kids sat on his porch and sang songs with him,
and there was story-telling and laughter.
And yes, his home was fixed --
by a group who let God use them in all their particularities,
each one of them grabbed hold of by God to do God's work.

I got a letter from Charles at Christmas, this past Christmas.

It said this:

To the congregation of Greenfield Hill Church.

Blessings to you all for the coming year.

I will never forget your blessings to me.

And then, just in case *I'd* forgotten, he made sure I knew:

thank you, he wrote, for Diana Rose and Shari and Matt and Perry and Matt and Jim.

Each one of them, that week,
we're instruments of God's peace,
tools in God's workshop,
each in their own particularity was just what was needed in Charles' life.

Whether you're headed to West Virginia this next week,
or hanging out here,
there is a use that God has in mind for you.

There's a task only you can do,
there's a love only you can bring.

Make us your instruments, God.
Make us your instruments.
Put us to work.

And now, I'd like to invite all our ASPers present today to come up front for our blessing....