

Put Me In, Coach sermon – July 22nd – Debbie Hull

[Song: "Center Field"] by John Fogerty

I love that song. Not so much because of the tune, but because of the spirit of the lyrics. It is all about somebody that wants to get into the game. He wants to play. He doesn't want to sit on the bench. He wants to be on the field making a contribution to the team. He has a "put me in coach" an attitude that we all should have in our hearts for God. I am Rev. Debbie Hull and our sermon series is about Influence.

When this song first came out in the 80's, I was playing softball. I mostly played catcher but occasionally played centerfield. The song influenced me to strive to be a better player for my coach and my team whether I was playing in the game or cheering from the bench. But now the song has a different meaning for me. As my "coach" is now God. And I am ready to play for God.

I haven't always been ready to play for God. Even though scripture reminds us that God has given us gifts, and that "Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; and whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies." I'm not sure I totally believed it.

I went on my first mission trip right after I graduated from seminary. I was working in a church and still not sure God called the right person. I got the chance to join a group going to Costa Rica. I went, not because I wanted to serve God but because Who wouldn't want to go to Costa Rica! I met Mary, the pastor of the Methodist church. She

is the one who influenced me and my ministry the most, not by what she said, but what she did. I watched her interact with the kids that stopped by. I went with her out into the forest to bring food to those who had none. She brought in 30 kids for us to provide VBS to. Only a few went to this church. Mary had gone out and told the kids what was being offered and they came. I feel Mary and God, influenced me more than I did anyone I met or anything I did there. Because of this trip I have had a passion for missions.

15 of us just came back from the family mission trip to Omaha. The Beck's, the Steele's, the Mitchell's, Barb Jump, and myself volunteered with The Big Garden. It was founded by the United Methodist Ministries in 2005. Their goal is to reduce hunger by increasing access to fresh, healthy produce and teaching people to grow, cook, & preserve their own! They hoped to be able to have 12 community gardens around Omaha. They now have over 160 gardens! We worked in 3 of them, pulling weeds, planting, mulching, and moving new fruit trees that will be planted soon. The kids also got to harvest cucumbers, eggplants and peppers which went to the food bank so patrons could receive fresh veggies! We also helped to set up the community farmer's market.

One of the many highlights of our trip was to go to lunch at Table of Grace. Anyone may go to this restaurant regardless of whether you can pay or not. Pay what you can and have a great meal. Share a table with a stranger and meet a new friend. You receive a main dish, a salad, drinks and a desert.

They are open 6 days a week for lunch. They have just started a food truck with the same concept that goes out into the community to find those needing meals. If someone hasn't been in the workforce for a while, they can volunteer at Table of Grace, work set hours so they can show they are reliable, learn to get into a routine again, then they can put this on a resume!

I just found out that Kansas City now has one of these restaurants, called Thelma's Kitchen, on 31st and Troost, open from 11 – 2 Monday through Friday. Pay what you can, if you can't pay, work 30 minutes at the restaurant to get a meal. They are working to build community, a place to know your neighbors.

At the end of our mission trip, Tim commented that although we did not have much contact with the community itself, we will never know how much we have influenced someone else's life by the work that we did. How many people will have a better meal because of the work we did. How will our lives change because of the relationships we formed and from what we learned. The question that faces the mission team now is "What is next? What do we want to do with what we learned? How can we make a difference in our own community? What will our "coach" want us to do and where can we be the biggest influence for someone? We are going to be meeting again soon to figure out what that will be.

The question I have for you, Do you have a “put me in Coach-God attitude?” Are you looking for ways you can serve God, to serve the church? The community? Psalm 100 tells us to SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS! So what are you going to do next?

One of the workers at Table of Grace came and talked to us after our meal. She told us how it got started, what a great boss she had and how wonderful it was to work there. At the end of her talk, she got a huge smile on her face, jumped up and yelled “praise God”

That’s the kind of influence we need to be making in our community. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, God is not through with any of you yet. God has given you a gift and you are expected to use it. The church is looking for Sunday school teachers, people to organize the worship bags, ushers, greeters. Maybe you are good at talking and can make calls to the homebound. Maybe you can be a lunch buddy at Roesland Elementary. These are ongoing ministries of the church. Maybe God is putting something new on your heart that you want to explore, come and talk to me about it. Our world is hurting and we need to be the change. We need to be making a difference in our community.

Are you willing to say “Put me in God, I’m ready to play, today!”

Only you can decide. Amen