

Sermon Starter

How to use this Sermon Starter:

Allow the text to get you started, then add your own examples through answering the thought-provoking questions to make it more personal. Take out any examples that do not apply to your setting or that you choose not to use.

People who have been helped by the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering, frequently comment that “you were here” after the flood, the earthquake, or the fire, or “I can’t believe the church showed up for me during my time of need.” Some even say, “I have given to this offering, but never thought it would help me.” Our gifts through the offering allows the church to show up and be here when people need it most. What’s more, OGHS works with congregations and organizations locally, those vested in the affected communities, so we can be present quickly, and help the people living in those communities rebuild their lives.

This is wonderful from the perspective of aid and material development, but what does it have to do with our faith? The theme for the offering, “**You are here,**” provides multiple possible avenues to explore the connection between human need, our faith, and this shared offering in today’s sermon.

❶ You are here could be the response to a question provoked by tragedy, fear and suffering: “Where are you, God?” Psalm 145:18 echoes the refrain throughout scripture that God is nearby, present with God’s people. As soon as a person calls on God, God is here.

When have you felt God’s presence in a time of deep need?

❷ Through the lens of Matthew’s parable, You are here answers the question: “Where do we find Christ in the world?” He is here, in those who hunger and thirst.

The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46) begins with something of a mixed metaphor—the Son of Man is seated as king on a throne, but acting as a shepherd—separating sheep from goats. This shepherd king divides people based on their response to basic human needs. Both groups are taken by surprise, and ask “when was it, Lord...?”

The needs described are anything but metaphorical, and are so basic that we can easily imagine them 2,000 years later—food, water, clothing, welcome, care when sick, visits when in prison. These needs are so basic that we can easily relate to them, because they are our needs, too. We don’t need to look outside our congregations or our

own families to find examples.

At the core of this passage is the claim that Christ is present in the human needs of this world, so that feeding the hungry is feeding Christ. This is a more dramatic claim than the idea that Christians can show Christ’s love through our deeds of kindness and work for justice. Rather, Christ completely identifies with “the least of these who are members of my family.” When someone is thirsty, Christ is thirsty. When we see a situation of need—Christ is here.

The glory of God is shown when hungry people are fed, strangers are welcomed, or wherever human need is met.

- How has your congregation fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, or reached out locally? Globally?
 - When have you personally encountered the face of Christ in people in need?
- ❸ You are here shows the church uniting to respond to those needs—when you, collectively, along with many others, give, it means that the church can be here, in the midst of need even when it is far away. Together, we are able to respond quickly and be here to stay when the needs are long-term. Pooling resources allows our reach to extend much farther into the world than any one person, congregation, or denomination can do alone.
- ❹ You are here addresses the question: “Where do I fit in this picture?” When God’s love abides in us, we are moved to respond with our own material goods to the needs of other members of the human family.

The first letter of John poses a pointed question: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (3:17) The letter writer, like the gospel writer, sees human community as united into one family in Christ. This letter is concerned with the ethical application of love—how love is lived out in life together. The question is followed with an admonishment, “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (3:18). True love, then, is expressed in deeds of generosity, not empty words. It also makes a theological point—when God’s love is here, abiding within us, we will respond generously with our worldly goods.

- When have you felt or seen love expressed more powerfully through actions than words?

Gracious and Loving God, ignite in us a desire to walk out our faith, by loving others as you have loved us. Amen.

