

Fifth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B)
Lamentations 3:22-33, Psalm 30, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43
June 26-27, 2021
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

This picture is hanging outside the entry to our Holy Trinity offices. Does anyone know what it is? (Lemme just say, the worship team is **so** grateful that some of the congregation is back, so they aren't on the hook to answer all my questions ☺.)

The year after Superstorm Sandy made landfall here at the Shore, our NJ Synod produced these orange kerchiefs. The design printed on them is the satellite image of the superstorm hovering over our Garden State. Superimposed on the weather are words from Psalm 46, assigned psalm for Reformation Sunday, the evening of which the storm hit (October 28, 2012):

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake in their surging.*

Psalm 46:1-5

Those words are on the piece of paper framed beneath the kerchief. This statement of gratitude follows:

We give thanks for all who have worked to alleviate the suffering wrought by the storm, including individual volunteers, members of MOVE (Manasquan Organization of Volunteer Efforts), the Furniture Bank, the Linen & Kitchen Brigade. The storm washed us out of the sanctuary and into the community. Thanks be to God!

Now here's the part that directly relates to today's reading from 2 Corinthians:

We remember with gratitude and fondness our friends from St. John's Lutheran Church, Phoenix, MD, and from St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Southport, N C. Their spiritual support and material assistance have lightened our burden and gladdened our hearts.

Before Sandy, we didn't know anyone from either of those out-of-state churches. Pastor Dave Nelson of St. Peter's in NC had served in NJ, so he knew and loved the Shore, but not us in particular. The Platt family from MD (Elaine & Patrick, and their children J. Dee and Mackenzie) didn't know us either. Their parish called our Synod office and asked to be put in touch with a congregation that could be a conduit for superstorm relief supplies. We were it! We received monetary gifts from St. Peter's and we received a truckload of supplies and a personal visit from the folks at St. John's. We have pictures of the Platts, Barb & Fred Vogel, Pastor Mark and me in front of our church sign, snow still on the ground from the Halloween snowstorm. We saw photos of the Platts' living room after it became the local collection center for donated bottles of water, containers of bleach, canned food, cleaning products, whatever they were told we needed. The Platts visited us twice, in person. Pastor Nelson stayed in touch and we continued to receive assistance from his congregation over the next couple years. This was no flash-in-the-pan. It was the steady light of Christ shining through them on us.

We here at Holy Trinity weren't accustomed to being on the receiving end of the kindness of strangers. The generosity of those two congregations was like a warm hug on a cold night. We knew we were not alone. We were grateful. We were humbled. And what a magnificent lesson that "We all take turns." "We all take turns giving **and** receiving." When hurricanes afflict other places, we remember. We send financial assistance and prayers. We are grateful for Lutheran Disaster Relief which helped us then and through which we help others now. This is why we make sure some of the money generated by our Holy Trinity Endowment Fund goes out into the larger world each year. We don't want to be continually building more silos to store our accumulated wealth. We want money to

become ministry, to become an answer to people's prayers. We are fully aware of and dedicated to the proposition that **we are blessed to be a blessing**. Many of the gifts that come **to** us are intended to flow **through** us to others.

St. Paul in today's lesson from 2 Corinthians is inspiring generosity in the Christian community in Corinth, on behalf of the Christian community in Jerusalem, "the Mother Church." He refers to it as "the collection for the saints" and he's tireless soliciting donations to help the struggling, materially impoverished church in Jerusalem. In his 1st letter to the Corinthians, in his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians, he beats the same drum: give! Give generously! He praises these Gentile Christians and challenges them to outdo each other in generosity. He predicts that if they assist others out of their abundance, others will someday assist them in their time of need. His trump card, though, is reminding them of every Christian's call to mirror (as best we can) the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ:

You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us – in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.
2 Corinthians 8:9 (*The Message*)

So what's the proper response other than to pour ourselves out for Him and for His Church? The way to thank God for divine generosity to us is to be divinely generous toward others. And oh, yes, let's not forget: "From those to whom much has been given, much will be expected." How could **we** possibly be more blessed than we are??

Paul is practical as well as spiritual. He doesn't prescribe a set number of shekels or drachmas or other coins of the realm that each Christian should give. He says:

For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have. (2 Corinthians 8:12)

Remember the widow's mite? The little lady puts a penny in the offering box and Jesus praises her. He says the "gift given" from her tiny purse was greater than someone else's million dollar check. We can't gauge generosity by the dollar amount of a gift. Only God reads the heart and sees the totality of a person's life.

The second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of the most beautiful descriptions of our Lord Jesus' total gift of self. He was God but laid aside the prerogatives, the benefits of divinity to become human like us. He:

*"... emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave...
and being found in human form,
he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death
– even death on a cross."*

Philippians 2:7-8

Paul points out in his letter to the Romans: the Father has sent the Son. Having already given the greatest Gift, what do you imagine the Father would withhold or say not to? Our **trust** that God will meet all our needs is the foundation of our ability and our desire to be generous with all we have. We pray for daily bread, and God delivers it in so many forms. We don't have to hoard our blessings, because our God provides. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need.... (2
Corinthians 8:12-14b)

