

All Saints Lutheran Church

Bowie, Maryland

2020 Devotional Booklet

*“Let Your Generosity get Out of Hand.”*



Twenty-one Daily Devotions Leading to

Consecration Sunday

**October 18, 2019**

# Introduction to the 2020 ASLC Devotional Booklet

## *Let Your Generosity Get Out of Hand*

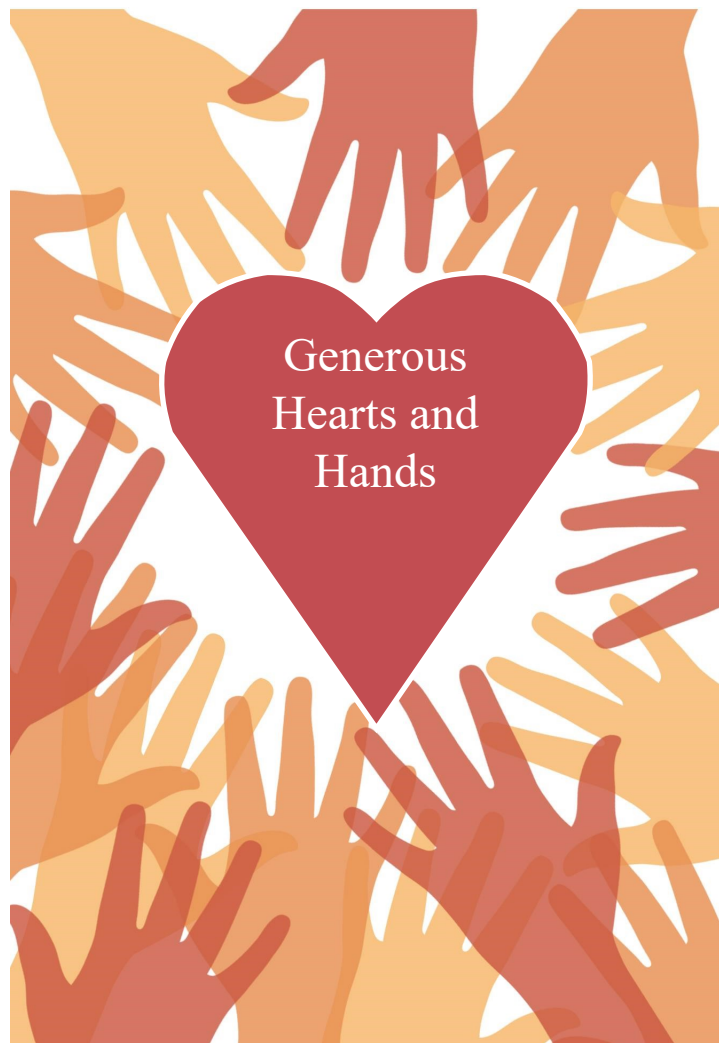
As we wrote our devotions in 2020, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic is constantly on our minds. The multitude and variety of its effects on our lives comes through as we have offered our thoughts and prayers in these offerings. Nonetheless, we continue to focus on letting our generosity get out of hand, so that God's work continues to get done.

Special thanks to Kelley Williams and Jean Reams for sharing their expertise to make this Devotional Booklet come to fruition, and to Diane Hampton for her continued leadership of the Stewardship Ministry Team. Special appreciation to Pastor Angela Shannon for her continuous support and guidance.

***Norma Allenbach-Schmidt***

Devotional Booklet Coordinator

Bible verse quotations for the devotions are from the *New Revised Standard Version*, online at Oremus Bible Browser <http://bible.oremus.org/>, unless otherwise noted.



**Sunday, September 27, 2020**

**Genesis 8:20**

*<sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar.*

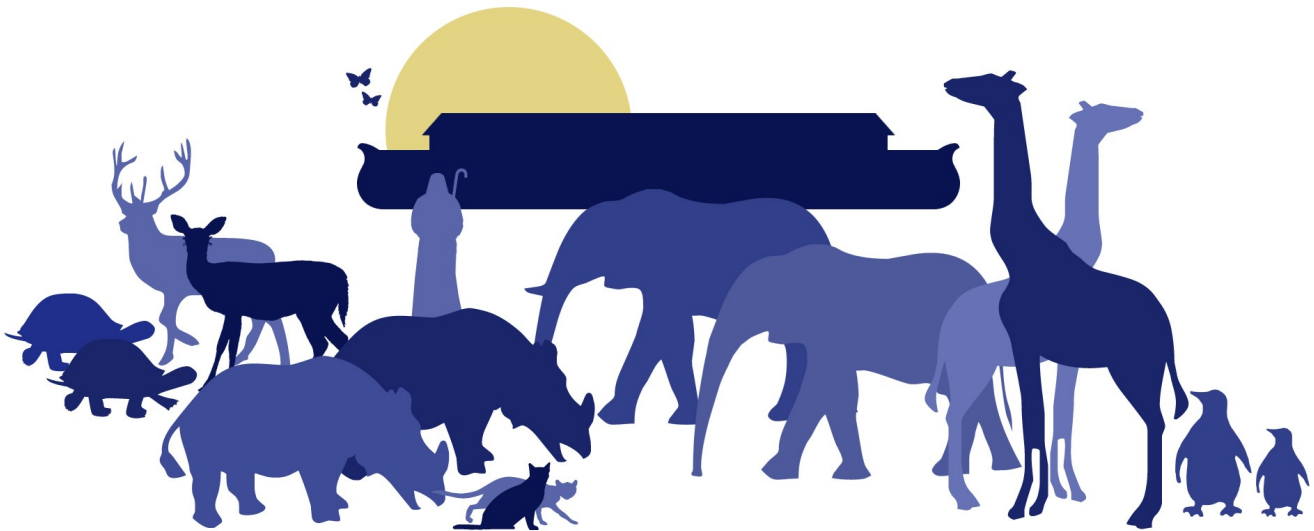
Giving generously to God and giving first to God are themes that run throughout the Bible. This verse comes near the conclusion of the Great Flood narrative in Genesis. After 40 days of constant rain, the flood waters have been receding and finally the ark is resting on dry land. Now picture this: Noah jumps off the ark and finds himself on a land where vegetation would be water-soaked at best and the few animals whose flesh would provide food are the ones that come off the ark with him. Is Noah's first thought, "How shall my family and I have enough to eat?" No, Noah's first thought is to show gratitude to God for life, safety, and an amazing deliverance. In the manner of the day, Noah presents some of these birds and animals as sacrificial gifts to God as his first act after disembarking. With so few plants and living creatures, sacrificing to God is an act of faith that God will provide enough. Furthermore, Noah is not responding to a commandment, but rather, acting spontaneously.

Fast forward to our present day. God continues to provide for our every need. In gratitude, we can think of God first, making sacrificial gifts to God in the form of our time, talents, and the financial means to support them.

Prayer:

*Dear God, may we follow Noah's example of gratitude and give to you first, regardless of our own needs and circumstances. When we do so, please let our generosity get out of hand.*

***Norma Allenbach-Schmidt***



**Monday, September 28, 2020**

**1 Chronicles 29:9 (NIV)**

*<sup>9</sup>The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.*

Why were the people and David so joyful at their leader's response of giving?

David asked who was willing to dedicate themselves to the Lord. The leaders of families, commanders, and officials gave freely of what they had of gold, silver, and bronze. They then gave their personal treasures of precious stones and worked where help was needed to build the temple. Everyone gave from the heart and this brought joy to the people because they knew the Lord would be pleased. David was pleased at the response as everyone came forward working and giving gifts, and the temple would be built as the Spirit had directed. God had chosen David's son Solomon to lead the work, and he stood strong as the leader. David referred to the Lord God as "my God" showing his strong desire to please the Lord God. He told his assembly that the palace was not for man but for the Lord God

Proverbs 18:16 (NIV) *A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.*

Are we joyful when we give, are we willingly giving back to God with understanding that all we have we have through Him?

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NIV) *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Prayer:

*Lord God, thank you for all the gifts you continue to give us. Let us always remember the gifts of love, sharing forgiveness, and helping others. Keep us strong in heart and mind so that we will continue to live in your Word. Amen*

**Elmer Jones**



**Tuesday, September 29, 2020**

**I Chronicles 29:14**

*<sup>14</sup>But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.*

Each Sunday, there was a whirlwind of activity as my mother readied three children for worship. Just before we got in the car, my mother gave each of my brothers and me one dollar for the offering. “It’s for the Lord.” “Yes, maaaaaa’am,” was the singsong lilt of our kid-pitched voices.

During the offering, as the plates were passed from one worshipper to the other, the congregation would join the choir in singing the chorus of “You Can’t Beat God Giving.”

Afterwards, Pastor Lowery would lift it high before the altar and chant, “All things come from thee, O Lord and from thine own, have we given thee.” Then he would address the congregation saying, “Not out of compulsion, have we given these offerings but out of love. For God loves a cheerful giver.” I can still hear his sonorous singing and the power of his voice which conveyed a depth of sincerity and palpable meaning. Years later, it occurred to me that my mother taught us in a tangible way the deep meaning of this scripture. She was good at distilling big concepts for little people.

We know that King David intended to build a temple to the glory of God. Since he was a warrior king, God passed this task to his son, King Solomon. In some ways, this must have been disappointing. Rather than sabotage the process, David organized what we would call a capital campaign. He gave generously and the people came forth with abundant freewill offerings as well. Inspired, David blessed the Lord! At the end of his blessing, he asked God before the assembly, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

Like my brothers and me, we gave to God what we had been given by my mother—that one dollar. I have often said that giving to God is like a child giving a gift to their parents with the money they gave to them. All creation belongs to God. Everything we have has been given to us out of love for us in wild abundance. In that same spirit, God trusts us to share with our church, our community, and the world.

Prayer:

*Gracious God, you open your heart in generosity and love. Teach us to share joyously the goodness of your bounty with our church, our neighbors, and all of creation. Open our hands and heart in your love. This in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

***Pastor Angela Shannon***





## Wednesday, September 30, 2020

### Psalm 116:12

<sup>12</sup>What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

*“What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?*

*I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord.*

*I will take the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord.*

*I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.”*

Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 67.

How familiar and comforting these words of the offertory liturgy are to all who have worshipped at All Saints! Traditionally, the offertory has been sung as gifts of thanksgiving are presented to the altar in communal worship. But times have changed dramatically with COVID 19, and communal worship has become online worship.

How do we now, in these unprecedented times, respond to the Lord for all the benefits the Lord has given us? How do we participate in an online offertory?

Dear Saints and friends, I believe that the response to this question is within the liturgy. “We will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord.” In very practical language, we must say, over and over again, a heartfelt “Thank You” both to God and to all who in any way support us, our loved ones, the members of our church family, our community, and our nation. The simple words, “Thank You.” mean so much to all.

In summary, how shall we respond to the Lord for all of the blessings the Lord bestows on us? The psalmist helps us respond.

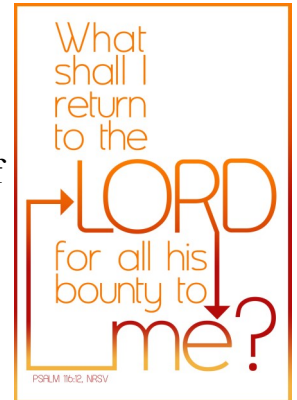
Say “Thank You” over and over again, both to our Lord and to everyone who helps us in any way. As well,

- Offer acts of kindness or support or encouragement to others. However small these acts may seem, they may mean the world to others.
- Support ASLC with your financial gifts, and as you are able, support organizations that help God’s children who are in special need, such as the Bowie Food Pantry.
- Stay in touch with family, other loved ones, and church family members through electronic contact or “snail mail” contact when physical contact is not a safe possibility.

### Prayer:

*Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us, our selves, our time and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who has offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 67)

**Louise Waynant**



**Thursday, October 1, 2020**

**Proverbs 17:3**

*<sup>3</sup> The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.*

In its original setting, the Book of Proverbs in general, and chapters 10 through 22 in particular, are constructed as an instruction book for young men at the court of the kings of the Israelites. The sages of the court, headed by Solomon, have assembled this to teach those youths how to be both responsible citizens and worthy followers of Yahweh. Solomon and his sages were writing under the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God. While their initial purpose may have been designed for a small group in a specific time and place, God was working through them to establish a guide for right living for all people and all time.

Our reading for today consists of a series of two sentence maxims, written using Hebrew poetic imagery to be memorable. While the English poetry we're familiar with is traditionally based on formal patterns of meter, structure, and rhyme, Hebrew poetry is based on formal patterns of meaning like repetition, completion, and opposition. In today's reading, we see a three-part poetic image that says as silver is made pure by the crucible, and gold is made pure by the furnace, the hearts of those who belong to God are made pure by the Lord's indwelling Spirit. When we feel impurities contaminating our hearts, that's when we need to talk to the Lord and ask Him to enter and purify us.

Just as silver and gold as a result of purification by heat become of more value, so we become of more value to both God and our sisters and brothers when we're purified. We are called to demonstrate our gratitude for our increase in value by seeking to raise others' value. That will often take the form of satisfying their basic needs of food, shelter, and health; sometimes it takes the form of sharing the gospel with them; and sometimes it takes the form of an ecstatic praise of the Lord in song or action.

Prayer:

*God our Parent, purify our hearts so that we can give others a place and example of unconstrained response to Your unconstrained love.*

*Jesus our Sibling, lead us to follow your example both of service and ecstasy, lead us to get out of hand in our thanks for all You have done for us.*

*Holy Spirit our Counselor, do the work of purifying our hearts, for we know we can not do it on our own, but must count on Your entering us.*

*Amen.*

***Sven Allenbach-Schmidt***

PURIFY  , GOD

Friday, October 2, 2020

**Matthew 6:19-21**

*<sup>19</sup>Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

This is one of those all-too-familiar verses that resonates differently within me given the current state of, well, everything. This year as I read, I hear Jesus speaking to the uncertainties and unknowns that mark so much of earthly life. We can't predict when or where thieves will strike. We can't predict which of our garments a moth will consume or how severe the damage will be.

I'm sure I don't need to spell out for anyone the many unknowns now facing us, both as individuals and as a collective community, nation, and world. We feel the uncertainty and even fear so acutely.

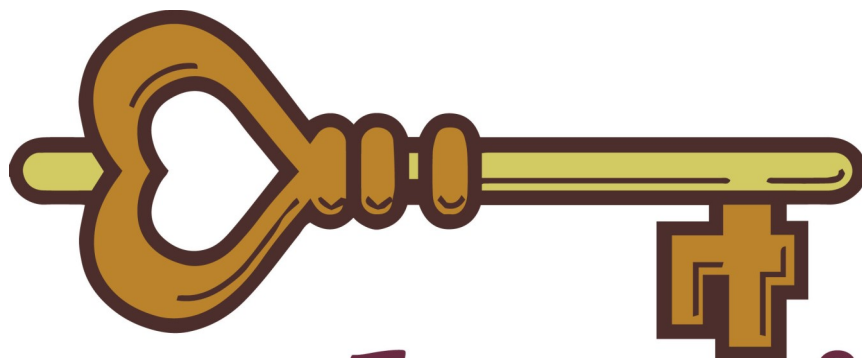
In this season of life, I find that the church provides me with something nothing else is able to: constancy and certainty. I know that we will gather every Sunday for worship and fellowship. I know that if I feel overwhelmed, one of the Saints will be there to commiserate and comfort. I know, through verses like this, that my Savior is fully aware of what I am feeling, that Jesus has been there, and that He is offering me relief. By fixing my attention on the cross, and on the earthly church that professes its meaning, I can know that this, at least, is unchanging, is sure and true. This is because of the love and grace of God, but also through the generosity in time, talent, and treasure of all of us as siblings in Christ that keep this Church steady.

I sorely need that certainty.

Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, I thank you for your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, who lived a fully human life and understands our uncertainty. I thank you, Jesus, for building us a church steady enough to withstand centuries. I give thanks for the word which provides the certainty of truth and love. Help us, in this time of so many unknowns, to know we are beloved, and inspire us to do our part to build the kingdom so that others may find certainty here as well. Amen.*

**Emily DeMarco**



WHAT DO YOU *Treasure?*



**Saturday, October 3, 2020**

**Luke 3:10-11 NIV**

<sup>10</sup>*What should we do then?*” the crowd asked. <sup>11</sup>*John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.*

As a child I watched as my grandmother and aunt prepared packages of food for neighbors who were elderly, ill, or simply in need. My sister and I would help deliver these packages to the nearby neighbors. One favorite bible verse to us about sharing comes from Hebrews 13:16 NIV: **“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”**

This has been a difficult year for everyone, yet we have witnessed people stepping up to help others with clothing, food, housing, and everyday basics. Pleasing unto the Lord, but the Bible asks that we give not just in times of trouble but to always lend that helping hand to the less fortunate.

1 Timothy 17:18 NIV: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth, which is uncertain, but put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”

Tithing not only supports the ministry at All Saints but the outreach programs serving the surrounding communities. Do not be discouraged if you feel your monetary gift is not large enough to help. Remember Luke 21:1-4 NIV: “As he looked up Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. **“I tell you the truth, he said, this poor widow has put in more than all others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”**

Little acts of kindness such as sharing a meal, helping with chores, a simple telephone call to check on someone, praying with others to lift their spirit, or simply a warm smile. These are a few ways you can let your generosity get out of hand.

Prayer

*Gracious Father, thank you for all you continuously give me. Help me to continue reaching out to those in need and sharing the gifts you have provided me and the gift of your uplifting Word.*

***Evelyn Jones***



**Luke 10:33-35**

<sup>33</sup> *But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.* <sup>34</sup> *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.* <sup>35</sup> *The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'*

The story of the “Good Samaritan” is one that is familiar to most of us, I would assume. And it is a story worth repeating. When Jesus told folks to go out and be good to their neighbors, he was questioned by a lawyer about the method to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered the lawyer with the story of the Samaritan, telling him “to go and do likewise,” showing mercy on your neighbor. A neighbor who is unlike you; a neighbor whose life has been endangered; a neighbor who you wouldn’t consider to be a neighbor.

With heightened awareness of Black Lives Matter, we can begin to put the words of the story into a story in today’s world. We see in the news every day another incident involving our neighbors. “Those people” who are beaten, and left for dead, whose lives do not intersect with our own. Do we walk on by them, feeling that they must have put themselves into a dangerous situation that doesn’t concern us? Do we pass by them because we are followers of the law? Or do we do as the Samaritan did and take pity on the broken man?

The Samaritan let his generosity get out of hand. He helped the man at the site. He still could’ve left him there, thinking he had done enough. Nope; the Samaritan went beyond bandaging him up, by getting the man to a safe place, taking care of him, and when he had to leave, paying the innkeeper two days’ wages to make sure the man would be well taken care of in the Samaritan’s absence.

How generous will we be? Will we show mercy to our neighbor? Will we comfort our neighbor when he is beaten? Tend to his wounds and then wait around for him to begin to heal? Will we be a part of the healing process?

Prayer:

*God of mercy, show us the path to taking care of our neighbors. Help us to overcome our fear of helping those who are not like us. Give us strength to stand up for our neighbors. We know who our neighbors are, and we know you command us to show them mercy. Amen.*

**Melissa Steiner**



**Monday, October 5, 2020**

**Luke 12:15**

*<sup>15</sup>And He said to them: Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*

“He who dies with the most toys wins.” Really?? There are all kinds of greed prevalent in our world today, but let’s not focus on those people and situations but rather on what Jesus is telling us and teaching us to do. Let’s just call it “Big greed” vs. “Little greed.” I think I’m guilty of little greed sometimes. Y’all know what I’m talking about—those little selfish moments when... (fill in the blanks.)

This verse is in the beginning of the “The Parable of the Rich Fool” (verses 13-20.) You know, it’s the parable where the rich man is going to tear down all his barns and build bigger ones so he could store all his grain then rest on his laurels. But God said: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” And Luke in verse 21 ends it by saying “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

So, am I preaching to the choir? I hope not! Self-reflection leads me to realize that I often put my own needs ahead of others. So now I begin my day with an intentional “one” thing that I can do that day that will be respectful, thoughtful, and selfless. Often, I don’t do that one thing but somehow, I find other ways to accomplish what I set out to do.

Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, thank you for reminding me to “Let ... Generosity get Out of Hand.” And thank you for the inspiring words of Mother Theresa who said: “It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving”. And finally, Lord, as stated in (ELW p.78,) “Almighty God guide us with justice in the workplace, so that we may never value things above people, or surrender honor to love of gain or lust for power.”*

*Amen.*

**David Conrad**



**Tuesday, October 6, 2020**

**Luke 12:29-31**

*<sup>29</sup>And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup>For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup>But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

Have you ever suffered for food? When I was in graduate school, I received a stipend of \$237 per month, in addition to tuition. I was poor! Of course, tuition was the most important thing to me, but by the time I paid my rent and gas bills, I seldom had more than \$15 left for food for the month. I survived mostly on soup—and yet was obese. I (poorly) made all my clothes. Hearing “don’t worry about it” did not set well with me. By the time Bobby Ferrin’s song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” came out, I was far enough away from the pain to laugh at it.

The people Luke was talking to matter more when we realize that food, drink, and clothing were not taken for granted by these people. For many, to have more than this would be luxury. In our culture these items are taken for granted by most. We find ourselves setting our hearts on bigger homes, nicer cars, bigger retirement accounts, computers with all the latest features, bigger TVs and sound systems, boats, RVs, second homes, the list goes on and on...

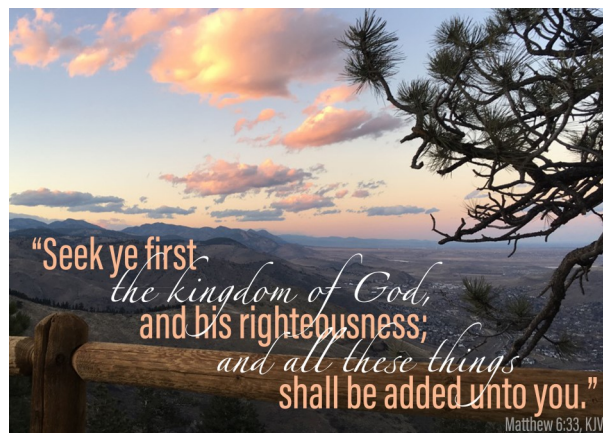
Statistics show that people who have the least are the most likely to tithe their income, while those with the greatest resources give the smallest proportion of their income to others. How safe do we have to feel before we can trust God to meet all our needs? Is it true that the more we have, the less we trust him? What is being asked of you or me that we are afraid to give? How wholehearted are we seeking his kingdom? What is getting in the way? This is not teaching that a Christian should renounce prudence in making a living for self and family; but it is a demotion of even such basic things as food and drink to a lesser priority than that of seeking the kingdom of God.

Earthly parents provide for their children. Your heavenly Parent will provide even more. You are in the family. You belong, and he /she cares for you very greatly indeed. Our priority is not the things of this world and getting as much of them for ourselves as we can. Our priority is putting the kingdom above all else, trusting God to provide whatever we need, and giving as much as we can.

Prayer:

*Lord, help me to give all of myself in your service. Help me to seek you and your kingdom with all of my heart. Help me to prioritize my days and hours to spend personal time with you every day, so there will be no question about how you would have me order my steps. Amen.*

**Ruth Ann Killion**





**Wednesday, October 7, 2020**

**Matthew 6:24**

*<sup>24</sup>No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

I suspect most of us prefer "both and" options to "either or" scenarios. Clinging to a "both and" mentality often allows us to avoid making difficult choices, taking concrete action, enduring sacrifice, or confronting hard truths—often to our detriment and the detriment of others. Consider, for example, the impact on all of us of those who have chosen to believe they can simultaneously keep themselves and others safe from COVID-19 and avoid taking precautions, changing behavior, or suffering inconvenience.

As Lutherans we hold fast to a "both and" theology. We worship a Christ both divine and human. We acknowledge that we are simultaneously both saint and sinner. Our salvation is the result of God's grace, a gift freely given; it is not the result of our merit or worthiness. Yet that gift of grace does not mean we can be faithful servants of God without making any necessary life choices, as Matthew 6:24 reminds us.

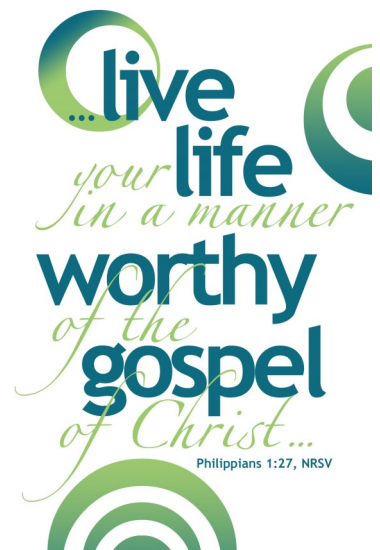
The Bible is replete with warnings about riches being a stumbling block for those who seek salvation. Matthew 19:24 and Luke 18:18-30 are other vivid reminders that we can not worship both God and wealth. We must either choose to put our trust in one or the other. "The faithful will abound with blessings, but one who is in a hurry to be rich will not go unpunished." (Proverbs 28:20)

A recent experience has led me to reflect at length on the implications of the widening wealth gap in this country. That morning at the Bowie Food Pantry, I reviewed the latest financial assistance applications received from local residents. Asked to describe how their current economic situation had been impacted by the pandemic, applicants responded with accounts of lost income due to a business shutdown, a family member's contracting of the virus, or a loss of day care resulting in the need to quit working to be a stay-at-home parent. Those narratives mirror the plight of millions of Americans now suffering from food insecurity, fear of eviction, and inability to pay their bills. Later that same day, at the recommendation of a financial advisor, I tuned in to a virtual economic outlook update which painted a very different scenario—a rosy portrait of a rebounding stock market and a recovering national economy. I pondered the implications of these divergent realities grounded in very different priorities and measures of worth. In truth, a perspective founded on stock market gains and corporate profits is indifferent to the economic plight of millions of Americans in need. The two outlooks and the values they reflect are as incompatible as our simultaneous worship of wealth and a God who champions the poor, and who commands us to care for the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, the oppressed. Ours is an "either or" choice of which god we will serve, for we will ultimately be devoted to the one and despise (i.e., "regard as unworthy of our interest or concern") the other.

Prayer (adapted from a prayer by Joyce Rupp):

*Gracious God, give us generous hearts to share whatever gifts you have given us; to acknowledge you as the giver of all good gifts; to give without counting the cost; to share without expecting something in return; to be wise in the way of caring for ourselves and others; to align our priorities with the truth of the Gospel; to be gracious and ungrudging in our giving; to be happy with having what we need and to know what we do not need; to recognize the abundance of blessings in each passing day; to know the freedom that comes with true generosity; to use our talents in service of others. Amen*

**Liz Muller**





## Thursday, October 8, 2020

### John 12: 1-3

<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

This is a story about how not to waste your life. It's also a story about motivation. Why do you do what you do for the Lord? Do you serve Him for the satisfaction you get when you see results? It is satisfying to see Him use you, but that's maybe the wrong motivation. Do you serve Him because it makes you feel good? It's gratifying and important to see others helped, but if that is your only reason that's the wrong incentive. The true motive for serving Christ is because He is worthy of everything we can do for Him and because you love Him and want to please Him, because He gave Himself for us willingly on the cross. We learn this from Mary's act of unselfish worship. This episode should teach us that we should come to Him and waste ourselves on Him. The disciples considered her act an unwarranted exhibition of wastefulness and a wanton display of affection but Jesus saw it as nothing less than a gift of one's whole self, down to a last strand of hair, and probably her last denarii. Her act was extravagant unselfishness. That's stewardship! Mary's act was a demonstration that people should come to Him and waste themselves on Him with the most precious items they own. Mary's actions say, "Do I treasure Jesus more than my stuff, more than my reputation, more than my pride?" Her perfume filled that room, touching all who were present. It could not be denied. Does grace have a scent? Can people smell the fragrance of Christ on you? Does it smell like the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Does your home smell like that? Do others sense the fragrance of your life from spending time at Jesus' feet, worshiping Him in selfless devotion? Do your relationships at church smell like the fragrance of Christ believers? People who come into All Saints should smell the sweet fragrance of our Savior on us. If you want to follow Mary's example of stewardship, you have to follow her example of sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to His word (Luke 10:39). Every time we encounter Mary in the Gospels, she is at Jesus' feet—first, learning from Him; then, pouring out her sorrow to Him; and now, expressing her love and devotion to Him. You won't love the Lord as you should unless you've spent time at His feet. You do that by spending consistent time in the Word, in service, and in prayer. To paraphrase Dietrich Bonhoeffer, grace is free but it isn't cheap. A life spent in selfless devotion to Jesus is not wasted, but a life spent on one's self totally is.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, let us show our love like Mary did. Let us see the big picture and lay our offerings small and great at Your feet. Let You turn them into miracles because we are not too good at that. Let our burial ointment rise to You like incense. Amen.*

*"If you are going to live, leave a legacy. Make an indelible mark on the world that cannot be erased."*  
Maya Angelou

**John Rees**



**Friday, October 9, 2020**

**John 21:9-12**

<sup>9</sup> *When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.* <sup>10</sup> *Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’* <sup>11</sup> *So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.* <sup>12</sup> *Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’*

This is my favorite scene from the Bible—hands down. These seven disciples have come back home after Jesus’ crucifixion. They carry with them the terror and grief and horror of the crucifixion, but also the incredible wonder of Jesus’ resurrection. Something beyond belief has come out of horror, and they are part of it, but I’m sure they were having a hard time getting their heads around it. Thoughts and questions must have whirled through their minds.

So, they’ve come home and back to family and the familiar. They are fishermen and they have family to feed. This they know how to do. But, no fish that night, they catch nothing, failure. As they’re coming in, they are greeted by the smell of a charcoal fire and fresh fish being grilled. The stranger tending the fire has told them to try the other side of the boat—where of course there are tons of fish! Well, 153 large ones to be exact, but a darned good haul. How could a stranger know more than fishermen on their home waters? Then, John recognizes Jesus and they go ashore filled with joy, and, I imagine, still a bit of wonder. What a breakfast that must have been: fresh grilled fish and bread on the seashore; food for a hungry body after a night’s hard and fruitless work; enough fish caught to feed their households and make some money for the family’s upkeep; and the comradery of all seven together with the Lord again, relaxing and enjoying this time together.

Do you see the height and depth of the gift Jesus gave here? The gift of sustenance, yes, both with the breakfast at hand and with the great haul of fish—a very practical gift. But also the gift of joy in the very surprise of his presence, the fishing advice, and the breakfast cooking. Gifts of the good physical feeling of using your muscles to pull in that haul of fish, gifts of smell and taste and hearing, gifts of comradery and remembering who you are and who you have become, and greatest of all, the gift of knowing Jesus was with you even when you couldn’t see him or didn’t recognize him.

Jesus didn’t answer the questions swirling in their heads directly. They needed time to digest the colossal changes they were living through. As he so often did, Jesus answered an underlying question, giving them reassurance that they weren’t alone. He had their backs, as we now say.

**Prayer:**

*Giving God, Give us the strength to know and follow your will, not only when the way is clear and we are sure of what we are doing, but also when we are full of questions and cannot see clearly. Remind us always that your will is the way of love toward all your children, and that the gifts we have to give are gifts of your generosity.*

**Kimberly Evans**



**Saturday, October 10, 2020**

**Acts 2:44-47**

*<sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Talk about letting your generosity get out of hand! The first believers lived in absolute community, having “all things in common.” That means they gave up all they had and trusted that God would provide back through that community. This is an extreme that is likely not possible in this day and age, especially now with the pandemic.

However, we can still learn from this example. What if, instead of giving some and keeping a healthy cushion for ourselves, we were to give so generously that we felt a bit nervous about not having enough? Would God come through and ensure that we had what we needed? Of course!

The problem is not that we don't trust God; it's that we have trouble believing our community would deliver the goods, acting as God's hands to provide what we need.

But we do have proof that God acts through the community around us. Needs are met. People are comforted, fed, clothed, and helped. We see it all the time, and so we praise God and have glad hearts.

All we have to do is take the next step and trust that if we give to the point of discomfort that God will provide for us, individually, if we fall into need.

And remember the end of this story: “And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Trusting in the Lord led to many more people hearing the Good News and coming to Christ. That is the promise to us, right here, right now, in All Saints, even through all the challenges we are facing. Thanks be to God!

Prayer:

*Lord, give us the courage to trust in you through trusting those you send to take care of us in our time of need. Help us to use this trust to take the next step and give more freely so that the needs of all might be met. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. So be it!*

**Mark Steiner**



## Sunday, October 11, 2020

### Acts 4:32-35

<sup>32</sup>Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The scene immediately preceding this verse, where Peter and John had healed a 40-year-old crippled man, ended with "...[the Community] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the word boldly." Would that we all could be filled with the holy spirit in our lives, it would change so much! The words "everything held in common..." are powerful. The communion among Christians goes beyond sharing the same faith in Jesus' resurrection, and meeting in the same place—there are also economic expectations and needs for the baptized, a *solidarity* with the needy in the community. Those who owned property sold it and brought the proceeds to lay at the apostles' feet, for equitable re-distribution.

A key phrase to me in this passage is the expression of a common sentiment and *feeling* at that time: "a rich blessing was upon them all." I am convinced this is what allowed a sense of solidarity to sweep up the whole group, carried by the "great power" of the testimony of the apostles of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This power of Jesus' spirit among us can be tapped by all!

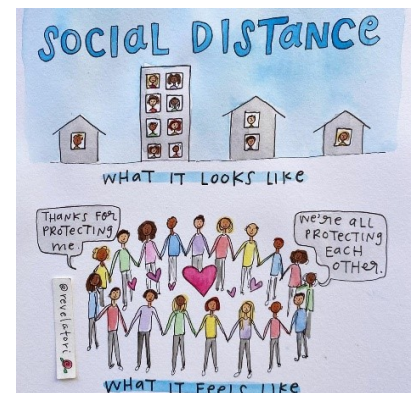
In the early church there were to be no more economic or social differences, through an ideal and practice of community of goods for the benefit of those in need. And in times of crisis, it appears that more people can bring up a sense of solidarity. Certainly this was true for quite some time after the 9/11/2001 tragedy in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania. We all felt a sense of the community of the human race and a common purpose. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there are plenty of examples also during the months of physical distancing, yet we need community so much.

In a recent personal example of solidarity—of the sort being repeated throughout workplaces around the world, I gather—I recently learned that one of my sons, a Captain with Spirit Airways, volunteered to go three months without assignments and just draw a minimal salary unlinked to his seniority. Other pilots joined this commitment in solidarity and it became official policy. For everyone going on voluntary partial furlough, 1.5 other younger pilots will not be furloughed. Everyone, from management to pilots and flight attendants *et alia* joined in this sense of "shared load," in the trust that the industry will recover enough to bring all back on board fully. The early Christians applied to their mutual relationships what the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment expected: You shall love the Lord with all your hearts, with all your soul, and all your power." This remains our highest and most potent charge, when we can feel and express the power of love, especially in times of stress and transformation—when we are called to be vehicles of, and hands for, God's spirit and love.

### Prayer:

*Great Spirit: Let us find solidarity in our time of personal need and societal challenge and transition to a "new normal" of changing hearts and minds for the greater good of all!*

**Walter Knausenberger**





# Monday, October 12, 2020

## Acts 20:35

<sup>35</sup> ... *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Various chapters of a book *Giving To God* by Mark Powell were used at the beginning of each Stewardship meeting this year to better understand what “**giving to God**” means. One of the chapters we reviewed was “Faithful Giving” which focused on Acts 20:35: “***It is more blessed to give than to receive.***” There were a number of **principles** as articulated in various passages in Paul’s Letters to the Romans and Corinthians regarding Christian giving. In summary, **Giving is:**

1. Both a duty and a delight;
2. To be regular and systematic according to a plan;
3. A demonstration of God’s grace;
4. Not being hampered by difficult circumstances, for even those who suffer affliction and experience poverty may exhibit generosity;
5. To be voluntary, not under compulsion;
6. Being proportionate to one’s income and circumstances, as each is expected to contribute according to his or her means;
7. Undertaken as a sacrifice, as some will feel inspired to give “beyond their means;”
8. A privilege, something we appreciate being able to do as a result of God’s grace;
9. Involving more than financial contributions – we first commit ourselves to the Lord and to the church at large;
10. A witness to the gospel, demonstrating the genuineness of the church’s love;
11. Making a pledge that the giver is committed to fulfilling over time;
12. To represent a personal commitment – each person is to make up his or her own mind about how much to give;
13. Not to be undertaken reluctantly but cheerfully;
14. Conducted in faith that God will provide for those who give; and
15. Bringing glory to God and leads people to give thanks to God.

I have to admit that after reading the above, I have a much better understanding of what “Giving” is. I have applied many of these principles and should consider others in the future as well. Which two are most important to the Congregation, and which two do you personally need to pay attention to? This leads to the next topic ... what are the **motives** in giving? Here are the basic motives:

- |                                  |                                             |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. To gain recognition;          | 6. To support a worthy cause;               |
| 2. To attain power or influence; | 7. To divest themselves of unwanted mammon; |
| 3. To appease God;               | 8. To give thanks;                          |
| 4. To earn rewards;              | 9. To express love for God; and             |
| 5. To fulfill an obligation;     | 10. To convey the Christ within.            |

Some are positive and some are negative and some are spiritual and some are down to earth. ***Giving is both something we ought to do and something that we want to do.*** My question to you is: Which of these has played the greatest role in moving you to give to the church or to other causes?

Prayer: *Almighty God, thank you for everything you have provided me and my family. Please hold my hand, and help me extend my other hand to those all around me.*

***Fred Wentland***





**Tuesday, October 13, 2020**

**2 Corinthians 8:1-4**

*<sup>1</sup>We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; <sup>2</sup>for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup>For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, <sup>4</sup>begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints—*

“During a severe ordeal of affliction.” How could those six words not reverberate loud and clear in our souls at a time like this? We do not know precisely what ordeal Paul is referring to when he describes the circumstances of the church in Macedonia, but we know that the early church experienced many tribulations including political persecution, natural disasters, famines, and internal conflicts. The racial tensions, socio-economic conflict, and global pandemic we are experiencing in this country and around the world would have fit right in.

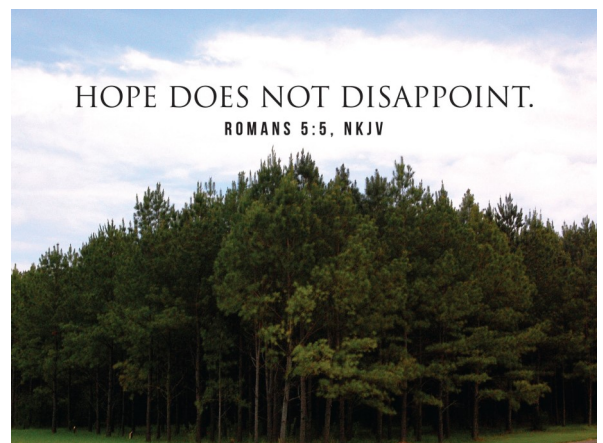
And what does Paul say about the church in Macedonia while they are in the midst of this “severe ordeal of affliction?” That their “abundant joy and extreme poverty” resulted in an outpouring of generosity. This seems doubly paradoxical. What kind of a people would respond to affliction with abundant joy? What kind of a people respond to poverty with giving to others beyond their means?

It’s simple. They were a people so infused with the grace of God that they did not see their lives as being under their dominion. They knew that the providence of God would carry them through whatever trials they were experiencing, and they knew that the salvation of God transcended any momentary circumstances, no matter how dire or difficult. God is good, all the time; and all the time, God is good. And because God’s plans for his people are plans for good and not for harm, the church in Macedonia could have absolute confidence in their care in the hands of a loving Parent. They could respond to affliction with abundant joy and a peace that passes understanding. They could respond to their poverty with an outpouring of sacrificial giving for their siblings in Christ who were suffering. They could pour themselves out, looking at the example of Christ who poured himself out for us, and know that their outpouring would not diminish their own wellbeing or joy, because their wellbeing and joy come from the eternal, unfathomable, infinitely renewable source of all wellbeing and joy.

The normal tribulations of life have not stopped for us in this time. Loved ones pass away and are grieved. Sickesses other than COVID-19 still affect us. The daily trials of life weigh on us the same as they always have, here in what C.S. Lewis called “the shadowlands.” And on top of that we are experiencing extraordinary social division, economic uncertainty, racial tension, and a once-in-a-century pandemic disease. We are certainly under “a severe ordeal of affliction.” But we have access to the very same grace of God that suffused the church of Macedonia. We have the very same assurances in the goodness of God and the certainty of God’s providence.

Prayer: *Loving and abundant God, you have plans for us to prosper, plans for good and not for evil. Remind us, gracious God, that we are beloved by you and you wish to give us your grace and providence. Keep us abiding in hope in this time of suffering, for hope in you does not disappoint. Give us generous and joyful hearts in response to the circumstances we face, and fill us with your peace.*

***John Summerlot***



**Wednesday, October 14, 2020**

**2 Corinthians 8:7b**

*<sup>7b</sup> Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.*

2020 has not been the year we expected it to be. We haven't worshiped together in the same physical location since February. COVID has disrupted our usual, comfortable lives, and even when it is safe again to return, our typical routines will not be the same.

We're already doing things we wouldn't have thought possible a year ago. We livestream our full worship service every Sunday. Other congregations might have a pre-recorded sermon and possibly an hour for bible study over Zoom. We do that too, by the way, on Sundays and Tuesdays.

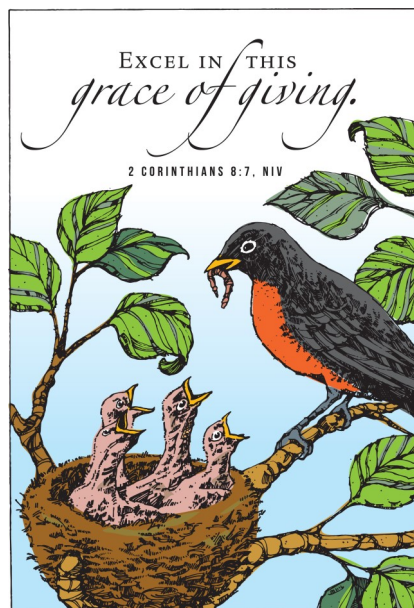
The point is that we are thriving as a congregation and as a community of faith. Even amidst this pandemic, the work of the Church must go on, and All Saints has consistently stepped up to do that work. We are in a unique position now, with the opportunity to expand our ministries beyond what any of us might have imagined. We already reach people across the country--across the world, even--at online worship every Sunday. How much farther can we reach? How much of a positive impact can we make on the world in the coming year? The coming decade?

Ministries are not free. As much as we might want to focus solely on our activities, on the work of our hands, it takes money to make those works reality. All Saints has always given generously, and it will take the generosity of all of us to realize the vision we outlined together barely a year ago. This year has pushed all of us past our comfort zones, but only by leaving the comfortable and familiar can we grow into the future God has planned for us. We have a great opportunity before us, and as we excel in all things, so we will excel in the new, good works that are to come, and we will do so together.

Prayer:

*Lord, though many have struggled through much of this past year, Your generosity and bounty continue to sustain us. Guide us in our future endeavors so that we may spread Your word and be Your hands in building a better world for all. Amen.*

***Austin DeMarco***



## Thursday, October 15

### 2 Corinthians 9:11

*<sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us,*

I feel blessed every day by God's generosity to me! I give thanks for good health, my loving family, and lots of friends. Before COVID, we had wonderful vacations, and I'm thankful for being able to travel with family and friends and see faraway places. We had weddings, birthday parties, movie outings, lunches, church potlucks, crab feasts, and many gatherings of family and friends. Now, we are not able to travel or participate in those gatherings, but I'm thankful for our memories! Even during COVID, I have been able to enjoy walking—appreciating continued good health and the beauty of nature; scrapbooking to keep my creative juices flowing; and reading to enrich my mind and help broaden my experiences. Through Zoom, video conferencing, and social media, we remain connected to one another so that we do not feel so isolated. I am thankful for all of these opportunities!

Have I done anything to deserve God's generosity? NO! I am keenly aware that I fall short in every way. I try to be a good listener to my friends, rejoice in their successes, and be supportive of them in times of trial. I volunteer at the food pantry, help out during Warm Nights, serve on various committees, sing in the choir, etc. Is this enough to make me worthy of God's generosity? No, because it's not "works" that gains favor with God. God provides generously to me and my family because he loves us—not because of anything we've done.

I am grateful for God's generosity and I try to be generous to others—through my time, talents, and treasures—because this is how I respond to God's love and show his presence in my life!

### Prayer:

*Dear Lord, help me to respond to God's generosity to me by being generous in return. Remind me to be thankful for all my blessings. Help me to let my generosity get out of hand! Amen*

***Diane Hampton***



You will be enriched  
in every way to be  
*generous in every way,*  
which through us will  
*produce thanksgiving*  
to God.

2 Corinthians 9:11

**Friday, October 16, 2020**

**2 Thessalonians 3:13**

<sup>13</sup>*Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.*

Do not become exhausted of doing the right thing. Do not tire of working toward good, positive change. Do not empty your cup as you thirst for the good in people, your community, state, country, and world. How are we supposed to do that?

My parents migrate south, with other “snowbirds” to Anna Maria Island on the West Coast of Florida, for one month each winter. For the past several years they have truly enjoyed their “vacation” church and pastor at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church with Pastor Doug Kings. They continue to watch his services, a bright side of COVID virtual services, and engage in Zoom book groups. They forward me Pastor Doug’s sermons and newsletters. A recent newsletter reflection resonated with me and this scripture.

Pastor Doug quoted Mark Nepo, who Kings cites as “a bestselling author, teacher, and poet who speaks and writes on spirituality and self-discovery.” Nepo recently made the following post on social media:

*Today, I am afraid that the noise of hate is drowning out the resilience of love. I fear that we are tripping into the dark ages. And yet, it remains unclear which way we are heading. Still, it is incumbent on us to help each other keep the literacy of the heart alive. Like waves at sea we all dip down and crest up. May we help each other rise.*

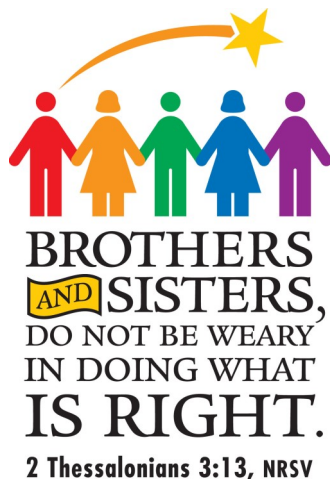
I cite Nepo, twice over, because his words are worth repeating. We dip down and then come back up. We tire and yet soldier on. We stumble and catch our footing. We get stuck and wiggle our way out.

The next time we are tired and weary, may we instead think of how we can pick ourselves up by raising up someone else. May we ask God for the forethought to raise our own spirit through our actions toward others. We have heavy burdens and most recently, heavy hearts. May we relieve some burden and patch our hearts through good work, work worthy of the Kingdom of God.

Prayer:

*God of grace, help us to rise with you and with others. When we feel tired and are fatigued help us to refresh our minds and bodies through meaningful actions, as we continue your good work. Amen.*

***Rachel Fahrner***



**Saturday, October 17, 2020**

**Hebrews 13:16**

*<sup>16</sup>Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

During this COVID-19 pandemic, many short film clips have appeared on television that have instructed us to wear a mask, keep a six-foot physical distance and wash our hands—all, of course, to help us stay as safe and healthy as possible. One, however, is different. It is a short clip of two young musicians, one with drums and the other with a saxophone, together playing music in the front yard of their home in an urban residential neighborhood.

Neighbors come out to listen and enjoy their music, and the musicians say they enjoy playing. In this time of isolation/quarantine, it's uplifting for them and their neighbors.

I imagine “gigs” for musicians have dried up as entertainment venues have closed and perhaps their financial well-being is in jeopardy. However, they are sharing what they have—their musical talent for others to enjoy.

We may not be musically inclined, but each of us has something we can share—smiling eyes while wearing a mask, a kind word, a phone call or email to a friend or neighbor, donations to the food pantry, and prayer. In this moment, and always, such acts of kindness and sacrifices of praise are pleasing to God.

Prayer:

*Gracious Lord, thank you for your kindness and the daily blessings you give to us. Help us to always find ways to share good things with others. May our acts of kindness be offered as praise to you.*

**Eloise R. Scott**

Do good and...  
share what you have,  
for such sacrifices  
are pleasing  
to God.

*Hebrews 13:16*







# Hands of Generosity