

Sermon: Hearing Aids in the Collection Plate
18 Pentecost, Year A
Philippians 3:4b-14

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I ran across a quote this week that says “Whatever you do, always give 100%... unless you are giving blood.” Our opening collect for today reminds us of the generosity of God. “Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour out upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask.”

Giving us those good things... We are reminded of those good things God has given God’s people over time through our readings for today. From Exodus, God gives the good thing of freedom from slavery. From Psalm 19, God gives the good things of the heavens declaring the glory of God and the firmament showing God’s handiwork. And then in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he writes from prison(!) of the generosity of God that is beyond everything else he has experienced in life so far; Paul considers all of his achievements of rank and station in life as nothing compared to the righteousness that comes from faith in God alone. With his upbringing and cultural and religious values, Paul had it all; he was the total package: “circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness under the law, blameless.” But he has come to realize all the things he held in great value, all of those accomplishments that at one time he would have been deeply proud of are nothing compared the gift of faith in Christ.

This letter that Paul has written from prison exudes joy. How strange is that? He has given to the fledgling church all that he has and even though he has paid a price in his imprisonment, he is joyful in it. Happy to share the gifts this generous God has given him, even from prison.

There are measurable and immeasurable results when we give. Scientific research indicates that most people who give are happier people. And happier people tend to give more of themselves. So there is this circle or cycle where giving leads to happiness and happiness leads to giving. At least one study indicates that spending money on others makes people happier than spending money on themselves. Another study shows that charitable giving actually lights up the middle region of the brain, the part that measures pleasure, the same part that lights up when we eat chocolate! So there is a science of generosity that is in agreement with Scripture’s message of the blessing of giving.

I wonder why then sometimes we don’t give of ourselves? Sometimes we do not give because we are afraid, afraid we will not have enough for ourselves, afraid our offerings will be rejected, afraid we can’t control the results of our giving. But that fear makes us smaller both psychologically and spiritually, less trusting and it can paralyze us. God’s generosity compels us to open, to grow, to trust, to give.

It is our tradition at Emmanuel to talk about stewardship in October as we consider our pledges and other gifts that we give to the church in another month or so. We will have different

Emmanuel speakers do a Stewardship Moment each Sunday, beginning today with Hal Meyers (8:00a.m.) and Jim Echols, our Junior Warden (10:00a.m.). I wonder, though, if rather than just thinking of stewardship as a season, if we can think of stewardship as a way of life, a way of being? By being good stewards, we become more conscious of the gifts we have, our money, yes, but also the other gifts that we have such as our time, our talents, our physical and spiritual presence, even our blood, (again, not 100% of it). When we pause to consider God's immeasurable gifts to us, we see the opportunity to be faithful and thankful stewards.

I know the people of this church are generous, and happy to give of yourselves. I see it over and over again –*God giving us those good things* in and through you. I see it in your generosity of person, of money, of understanding, of openness to God's spirit and in your generosity of love. I saw it last night with our pig roast for Haiti: some gave time, spent much of the previous night at the church to actually cook the pig, others brought food, others brought money and a generous appetite. Chic Street Man gave of his musical talent and ability to connect with his audience to help us raise funds and awareness for Haiti. And as so many gave of yourselves there was a wonderful pervasive joy throughout the evening.

By now most of you have heard that our beloved member Kit Carter died Wednesday afternoon. Kit was a very giving person. She gave of herself, didn't hold back her love. At 92 years of age she started volunteering with our Emmanuel prison ministry at Augusta Correctional. All she had to do was show up. And the inmates loved her. They could tell she loved them even though she didn't know them. They brought her a special chair to sit in and she just beamed throughout the entire Vespers service. She was not afraid to give of herself, and as a result, brought a lot of joy to those around her. One Sunday not too long ago as her health was failing, when the collection plate came her way, she put her hands in her pockets, pulled out her hearing aids and put them in the plate! And we both laughed hysterically when I called her later to ask if they were hers. She said she didn't have any money in her pockets that day so she put the hearing aids in. (Just in case you are wondering, we did give her back her hearing aids!)

We are able to give because of God's generosity. Generosity can be seen as a sign of good health. God has blessed us with much. If we are not already there yet, can we enter that beautiful circle of giving and being happy, being happy and then giving? And remember, we are not asking anyone to give us your hearing aids!

Amen.