

“The Gift of Giving”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
November 24, 2019**

New Testament Lesson: 2 Corinthians 9:11-15

Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 16:10-11

The Rev. Bob Kaylor of Park City, Utah, tells about a church that was broken into and robbed. But when the robbers opened the bank bag, they were no doubt disappointed: it contained \$70,000 in pledge cards from the stewardship campaign, and nothing more.

Had they found cash in the bag, the situation would have been very different: the criminals would have made out like, well, bandits, and the church’s ministries would have been severely affected.

As it was, \$70,000 worth of “commitment” offered them nothing they could take to the bank. To the church, though, \$70,000 worth of commitment was worth infinitely more than the cash. It’s a promise of faith, a treasure that cannot be stolen.

Today, we gather in Thanksgiving to God for the treasure of First Presbyterian Church of Independence, a treasure that can not be stolen. And I’m talking not only about the pledge cards we will bring forward at the end of worship today, but also the ministries of this church that bless the lives of our members and friends, our community, and people around the globe.

As the church, we are called to produce thanksgiving to God through our ministry. In today’s New Testament lesson, the Apostle Paul points all the way back to the 1st century church in Corinth as a way of encouraging us in our 21st century ministry here in Independence. In just five verses of scripture, Paul mentions thanksgiving to God three times – “you ... produce thanksgiving to God,” says Paul, as your generosity “overflows with many thanksgivings to God,” to which Paul declares, “Thanks be to God...!”

Do you get the sense that this church and its ministries are not about us? They’re not. The ministries of this church are about God and what God is doing through us! I hope you know all the glorious things that God is doing through First Church, though quite frankly, they are truly beyond knowing, at least not fully. The Spirit of God is so powerful, so vast, so faithful generation to generation that we can never know all the blessings that flow forth from First Church. And yet, we have faith that they do, and we have the privilege of being a part of them, during our generation’s time here at First Church.

Last week, the Session -the church counsel- reviewed our Mission Statement – “In Service to all God’s Children and Their Families.” By the way, “All God’s Children and Their Families” means all our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as those we know and love who do not yet know and follow the Lord. We count them, too, as precious members of the human family, people whom God is reaching out to through us. All God’s children, whether they know Christ, or have yet to do so.

Anyway, in reviewing that Mission Statement, Session members listed some of the ministry programs of First Church that have us living into that mission – serving all God’s children. Since today is a day of Thanksgiving here at First Church, I am going to invite you to share ways we serve all God’s children and their families. Anybody? How do you see us being in service to all God’s children? Raise your hand and we’ll bring you a mic, so you can be heard throughout this sanctuary and all the way up to heaven and back.

(Open Table, Thanksgiving Meal, Mission Outreach, Young Life, Scouts, TOPS, Trunk ‘n’ Treat, the Rummage Sale, the Chocolate Festival, our Advent Services, Music Ministry, LOGOS, Worship, Pastoral Care and Financial Assistance)

... Thank you. Lot’s of ways that God is working through this church in service to our members and friends, reaching out to our community, and providing for the stranger in our midst and around the world.

Of course, we know that in all of this, we are but a vessel for God’s great care and compassion, generosity and provision. As the Apostle Paul says, through your faith in Jesus Christ, obedience to God’s call, and generosity of Spirit, “you glorify God.” Speaking of generosity of Spirit, biographer Evan Thomas tells of the generosity of Robert Kennedy, in Spirit if not in fact. In his book “Robert Kennedy: His Life,”¹ Thomas notes that Kennedy, a child of wealth and privilege, rarely carried cash, relying instead upon various members of his entourage to pick up his tabs.

One day Kennedy attended a church service with a friend, who dutifully placed a dollar in the collection plate on his behalf. Seeing this, Kennedy was heard muttering in protest: “Don’t you think I’d be more generous than that?”

I’m sure Robert Kennedy was known as a generous person. Praise God that our church is becoming known in this community as the Spirit-filled, selfless, imaginative, energetic church that we are, with God’s help. We have so much to offer our community.

¹ Touchstone, 2002.

Those to whom we minister through our committees, volunteers and staff, through our facilities and ministry programs, they long for us, just as those served by the church in Corinth longed for them. As Paul says of the church in Corinth – and our church here – you glorify God “while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given to you.” – to us.

As we prepare to give of ourselves in the coming year – financially, spiritually and diligently, in the Spirit of selfless love and heart-felt compassion – there are people in this world, in our community, among our members and friends who are longing for the ministries of First Church.

Thanks be to God for your presence here today, and your faithful participation in all the days to come! Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

As we come before you in prayer, loving God, we offer first our thanksgiving that you are always present to us.

Forgive us for the times that we have not been present to you.

We pray your comfort and presence for those who are grieving and the assurance of your love and presence for those separated from family.

We pray, too, for all those we hold in our hearts in this moment of silence. *(30-40 sec.)*

We pray all this, loving God, in the name of your greatest gift to us, Jesus the Christ, praying together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**