

“It Takes a Faith”

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First Presbyterian Church
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Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 16:10-12
New Testament Lesson: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Robert Kennedy – you know, the presidential hopeful from the 1960s – he was born into a family of wealth and privilege, and yet he rarely carried any cash. Instead, Kennedy relied upon members of his support staff to pick up the tab.

One day Kennedy attended church with a friend who dutifully put a dollar in the collection plate on his behalf. Seeing this, Kennedy turned to him and muttered, “Don’t you think I’d be more generous than that?”¹ Kennedy chose to leave his generosity – his giving – up to someone else, missing out on showing just how good God is in his life and in the lives of those for whom the church is a true blessing.

Today is the first Sunday after the 2016 Presidential Election. While we’re not here to talk about politics, church is the place we come to talk about our choices – the choices we make and how they effect our lives and the lives of others – the lives of our family and loved ones, our coworkers and classmates, and the lives of the people we call friends, enemies and strangers.

Today is the Sunday after the election, and also at First Presbyterian Church, today is the Sunday before we bring our financial pledges for 2017 to the Lord’s Table, which we will do next Sunday. In order for us to show just how good God is, our choices are more important than ever, particularly following an election year like we’ve just had. How we choose to respond matters.

We each need to be sensitive to the feelings and fears, the hopes and vision of the other guy – the other person. As Christians, we seek to show how good God is by sharing with one another the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that it is Christ who is Lord of all. When it comes to our nation and to our church we’re in this together, poor and rich, Republican and Democrat, retired and working. We are the nation. You are the church. And as Christians – you and I are called to share our time, talents and treasures with this community of faith. By sharing what we have, we live out our hope in God’s work, our hope for a more peaceable world, and a world of abundant blessings, for all people. Or as we heard today in Second Corinthians “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.” Every blessing you have is made to be shared with others, even in the midst of uncertainty. In fact, uncertainty is no reason to hold back!

¹ Thomas, Evans, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (Touchstone, 2002).

On the contrary, uncertainty gives us the opportunity to grow in our faith. We have the opportunity this week to declare to ourselves and our God that we put our trust – not in political leaders – but in the Lord! Jesus Christ has already assured our future through his life, death, resurrection, and promise of coming, the promise of a new day dawning.

In Christ, we have the assurance that everything will be OK – us included – we will be OK, no matter who is president or what the future might bring. That is our faith. And in that faith, we are called to give of ourselves so that others will come to know and rely upon faith in God, a faith that is nurtured and stretched through our active participation at this church. “The point is this,” says Corinthians. “The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

In other words, if you want to be blessed by a deeper faith, then give abundantly and joyfully. We can do that confidence because of our shared commitment to selflessness and generosity, a commitment that assures a bright future for us and for all people.

Next Sunday is our Thanksgiving Potluck. This started out as an All-Church Thanksgiving Meal and has since grew into a Community Thanksgiving Dinner. God took our love of fellowship with one another and multiplied it to feed the masses – nearly 200 people from the Palmer Center and Pleasant Heights and other parts of our community will sit down at the table with us next Sunday. Nearly 200 people who might otherwise not have a Thanksgiving meals with friends and family.

Hosting a Community Thanksgiving Dinner takes faith. It takes a faith that invites others to come alongside us, regardless of our differences. It takes a faith that brings forth an abundance of food from a limited number of people.

It takes a faith that uses many hands to make light work. It takes a faith that overcomes the natural worry and resistance of undertaking such a meal and replaces it with the wonder and awe of coming together to do so much more than any one of us standing alone.

I can't help seeing our Community Thanksgiving Dinner as an example for the nation, an example of a faith and Spirit that sets aside differences, generates abundance, and accomplishes great things, together, as one people, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. God bless our Veteran's, this Veteran's Day weekend.

Giving of ourselves in a time of uncertainty takes faith. It takes a faith that believes what we heard in 2 Cor. where it says “You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us” – through you. There are people who thank God for you, because of what you give to this church. Don't you feel that, the thanksgiving of others?

You should, because others are blessed by your active participation in this church. And you, too, are blessed, when you give to the church –give to the church – not reluctantly, but out of our love of God, our faith in Jesus Christ, and our trust in the Holy Spirit.

When you and your family decide how much you'll be giving to First Presbyterian Church next year, the first question to ask is who is God to you – a God of scarcity or a God of abundance, a God of faith or a God of fear.

Imagine yourself, next week, placing your pledge card on the Lord's Table, and in your heart of hearts you hear God saying to you – not "Don't you think I'd be more generous than that...?" – but rather, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Let us show ourselves and the world that we are a people of faith, that we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

We come to this place of prayer, O God, with much on our hearts. We have elected a new leader for our country. Many are pleased, others are worried. Help us, Lord, to put our hope in you.

You are a refuge, our strength, a guide for our nation and its leaders. Help us to be still and know that you are God, and in you we find rest for our weary hearts, and hope for our souls.

Lord God, we are fully aware that we do not live in a perfect world. So open our eyes to what can be, O God. Let us be a people of faith-full action.

May we ourselves be the answer when we wonder what to do; enable each of us to be a person who turns boundaries of exclusion into circles of embrace.

Let us be a people of hope so that where darkness exists, we might bring light. Let us live our lives in such a way that Jesus would say of us, "Here is a woman; here is a man; here is a child of great faith ..., here is a person of great love."

We pray in the name of the one who showed us what a life of love and perfection looks like, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together as one people, 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.**