



The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

BROOKLYN • QUEENS • NASSAU • SUFFOLK

Sermon for the Eighteenth Sunday of Pentecost

Proper 22A1

October 4, 2020

Canon Suzanne Culhane

Canon for Stewardship, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Wouldn't it be cool if we actually had the nerve to greet one another like this? This is how St. Paul begins his letter to the Philippians: Grace to you. I wish you God's unmerited favor. Undeserved and unearned. Forgiveness of your sins, enlightenment of your minds, stirring of your hearts, strengthening of your wills. All of this is my wish for you. Grace to you.

And it gets better: St. Paul goes on to open this letter with an intense offering of thanksgiving. He gives thanks for the community's faith, their love, their acts, and proclamation. And he continues with praying for the deepening of their relationship with God. He wants them to know these truths on an even greater level. That they may fully experience the hope and joy that are the essence of our faith.

He believes that is the richness to which we are called – the surpassing value of knowing Christ and His immeasurable power. Because God's grace cannot be quantified, St. Paul wants these good people to have deeper and deeper, better and better, richer and richer, experiences of it. He can't get enough of God's grace. And that is his prayer for them. Because of his relationship with them, and their tangible relationship with God, he wants their spiritual experience to progress. To move forward, and beyond anything they've ever witnessed.

Because of God's vast goodness, and grace and power, he believes it can never be enough. He gives thanks for them and prays for them because they are united in this extraordinary relationship.

Thanksgiving and relationship are the essence of stewardship. Because we have been given so much, immeasurable amounts of love and acceptance, purely through grace, and because we are in relationship with God and one another, we are called to give in that gratitude. In fact, we are called to give "for the building of God's Kingdom." It is our duty, but also our primary action as disciples of Christ and our action as Church leaders, to give just as we have been given.

Our giving helps build the Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom of God is a place where the needs of every living creature are satisfied, all human beings are free, and have pure dignity. The Kingdom is a place where God's abundance and provision reign. And it is so much closer than we may actually think.

Because, you see, we have the power to help make the Kingdom come. All we must do is faithfully use God's generous gifts – every bit of our time, talent, and treasure. There is power in our giving. Great, great power. With our giving, we express God's power and presence in the world.

Renowned theologian Walter Brueggemann talked about it this way. Our wisdom and trust in God's abundance allow us, he says, "To live according to an ethic whereby we are not driven, controlled, anxious, frantic or greedy, precisely because we are sufficiently at home and at peace to care about others as we have been cared for."

What matters? What really matters? Time and time again we are asked to consider this question as humans and as Christians. We see this now, throughout time, and certainly throughout scripture. What matters?

St. Paul is able to say that everything else is "rubbish" once we know Christ and the power of his resurrection. That is all that matters. God's commandments help us to stick to these priorities. Because God has brought us out of the desert and liberated us from death itself, we can have no other gods. The first fruits of our work must be given to God, because we are not the owners, we are simply the caretakers.

And don't you feel sorry for those poor tenants in today's Gospel parable? They have seriously confused "owning" with "leasing." Not to mention the concepts of inheritance and heirs. I suppose there was no "Finance for Dummies" back then!

What WE know, as disciples of Christ, is that we are not the owners, and even we too are the Lord's possession. We take on both responsibilities and privileges by being in relationship with God and accepting His reign. Giving is one. Giving matters.

One of our parishes recently asked me, somewhat tongue in cheek, if I could provide the "magic pill" for good stewardship. And what I said, was that IF there were such a thing as a "magic pill," it would be administered as a multivitamin in early childhood to begin the ideal lifelong growth and understanding of stewardship.

The reality is that we are the magic pill. Our best giving and example offer this access to God's Kingdom. Relief for our children, one another, and the world. We hold in our hands the "healing balm" so desperately needed right now.

And the needs are great. Over the last few months, I have had folks turn up in my parish office, asking for the most basic of supplies: food for their children, help with medicine, tampons, and deodorant. Basic items of hygiene and comfort. There is power in our giving. Power to relieve

suffering. Power to restore dignity. Power to convey God's unconditional love. There is power in our giving. Great, great, power to make God's Kingdom come. When we put God first in our giving and when we care for our brothers and sisters, this must be our attention as we consider our financial giving for the season and year ahead.

Today is such a true joy as together we resume celebration of the Holy Eucharist – the Great Thanksgiving. Our procession to God's altar once again leads us to wild abundance even as we stay six feet apart.

And let us remember that the gifts of the people are fundamental to the celebration of the Eucharist. It is our offerings of life and labor that enable God's grace. Claim the power in your giving!

Make Christ King!