

“Sharing What You Have”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
John Knox Presbyterian Church – August 28, 2016

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.... Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

I am going to steal one of Erin Mansell's words from her message last week. “WOW!” How many of you would agree that community picnics can be a little exhausting? How many of you would agree that community picnics are amazing gifts? I was so proud of our congregation, yesterday. “WOW!” All the time of planning and preparing came to fruition and it was glorious! Yes, it rained! It rained, a lot! No, we did not get to use the tent. No, we did not get to use the rented sound system.

But, we had wonderful fellowship with each other. It was wonderful to see so many people from our congregation coming together, working together and loving each other. I was very proud to be a part of this congregation! The wet soggy day did not keep our neighbors away. The children got to enjoy the bounce house. We had strangers come to our church because we invited them to eat and share our life with us. We invited guests and family to share in this day. Yes, we hoped more would have come. But, perhaps for our first picnic, we had just the right amount.

The older I get I realize that it is not about the numbers. With my business background, I have struggled greatly to get to this point. But God has shown me time and time again that the people, who come for events, programs or whatever the gathering, are the people that God wanted there.

So, how was it with the people that God brought together yesterday? Was it difficult to sit down and talk with someone you did not know? Did you find yourself wanting to do something rather than wanting to just visit with our neighbors?

I was moved to find that our new members mailings brought us a couple, who use to attend John Knox years ago. I was also stumped by one our guests, who asked me, “Will there be any black people at the picnic?” Before I could answer, one member responded, “Well, I hope so.” It made me wonder how strange it is to go into a setting like John Knox and be the minority. How does it feel to be in their shoes?

It was interesting to find that we had one person use the food pantry from our New Beginnings program and another inquire about it. I am grateful to 3 of our members who offered rides to get folks home. There was food in abundance shared both at the picnic and many left with to-go containers. We were true Presbyterians in regards to the food.

There was nurturing of children as our youth and the Boy Scouts played games and manned the Bounce House. This was an opportunity for us to partner in ministry with Nueva Creación as well as Pavel and his fellow musicians from Witherspoon Presbyterian Church.

Again, I say, "WOW!" Why was this so important to open our doors to our neighbors? Why was it so important for us to sit down and talk with strangers? Why are we called by God to share with others?

The letter to the Hebrews in our scripture today speaks directly to this. This portion of scripture gives us a random list of how to live out our lives as Christians. The only thing that really connects the items on the list is relationships. Those with each other and God.

We hear from the author of Hebrews to mutually love each other continually – not just when we feel like it or for an hour or so but continually. We are called to show hospitality to strangers and sometimes in doing so we may entertain angels.

In her book titled "Practicing Our Faith", Dorothy Bass and Ana María Pineda spend one whole chapter speaking about the importance of living out our faith by offering hospitality to others, especially the stranger. Dorothy says, "To welcome the stranger is to acknowledge him or her as a human being made in God's image. It is to treat her or him as one of equal worth with ourselves – indeed, as one who may teach us something out of the richness of experiences different from our own." (Practicing Our Faith; Josey-Bass – A Wiley Imprint; 1997; Editor – Dorothy Bass and written by Ana María Pineda; p. 38)

Junior came to John Knox seeking community service. He is a 19 year-old from Honduras. His aunt attends Nueva Creación and the court system recommended a church to do his service. So, he came wanting to give and receive. We are blessed with Kim Grant, our secretary. She is so good at working with strangers and she welcomed Junior with open arms. It is interesting how God many times will send you what you need. Junior is a professional painter. He was more than willing to help paint our curbs and wood trim around our outside lighting. And, he was one of the folks who painted our VBS murals. Junior also shared his story. He left on Honduras on foot and it took him 8 months to reach the United States. This was all at the age of 14-15 years of age. I can't imagine how scary this was for him. His parents had no idea where he was as he made his way to find refuge at his aunt's home in Kentucky. He now lives here in Indianapolis with his brother, who operates his own painting business.

He had to do community service because he got caught driving without a driver's license. He is not a citizen so therefore cannot get a license. But, he has to work to survive and he must drive to get to work. This young man is polite and he was very diligent in working to complete his time.

What started out with us giving hospitality to Junior turned into so much more as I learned how fortunate I am to live in the US and have the rights of a citizen which I take for granted. It blew me away how brave this young man is. Junior's time with us was a time of mutual sharing as we both learned from each other.

When we offer hospitality to a stranger, there are many times we receive as much as we have given – some times more. Dorothy Bass refers to this as mutual hospitality. She says, "This circle of mutual hospitality can embrace and transform the people who enter it." (Practicing Our Faith; Josey-Bass – A Wiley Imprint; 1997; Editor – Dorothy Bass and written by Ana María Pineda; p. 34) Perhaps, this is where God's messengers or angels appear to mold and shape us as we interact with them.

The scripture in Hebrews goes onto remind us that we are to remember the prisoner and those who are tortured. We never know who is going to come through our doors of the church. We don't

know what they have experienced. After hearing about human trafficking from Purchased during our last Sunday Evenings Together, I learned that you don't have to be behind bars to be in prison. Torture can come in many forms. God alerts us to put ourselves in the shoes of the afflicted so that we can be aware when we share in the journey that they travel.

The scripture goes on to say that we are to protect and honor our relationships in marriage. We are also called to honor what God provides for us. We are not to love money or the power that it offers.

We are also urged to remember those who teach us about God's word because we are to imitate their faith. Can you think of a past teacher whose deep faith in God has made a huge impact on the way you live out your faith? The first people that come to mind are my parents. Many people may think that they are weird because they have opened their home and hearts up to over all the 30+ foreign exchange students and random people that have come into their lives. But they have learned and been transformed in some way by all of them.

The other people that come to mind are not old and gray (sorry mom and dad!) but our youth from last Sunday. How many of you were blown away by their messages last Sunday? I was blown away by the sharing of their faith in God and how the strangers who they had encountered in their time spent in West Virginia and their time at Triennium had made such a bold impact on their lives. I appreciated their open honesty about their faith and how sometimes it is strong and other times it is filled with doubt. We have all been there and we can all learn by what they shared.

This is how the author of Hebrews ends this scripture. We are to share what we have. We have been given so much by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who is the same – yesterday, today and forever. For this we give praise and thanks to God! How do we live faithfully by this?

C. S. Lewis once keenly observed that, while Christians may think what they most want is to possess life's beauty, this is not their deepest hope. Their most ardent hope and desire is to share in the beauty – to participate in the beauty and goodness of life. The scripture passage ends by saying, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." (Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 4; Westminster John Knox Press; 2010; p. 19)

DeAmon Harges was at the picnic yesterday. DeAmon is the community worker who has been working with a group of us to teach us how to connect with our neighbors in our community which will in turn help strengthen our ministry at John Knox. His comment to me was that maybe you didn't connect with a huge number of neighbors but it is clear that you have shared. We are to share what we have. We shared with each other and we shared with our community. By the food, flyers, signage, tent, bounce house, musical gifts, hospitality, time, talents and treasure, it should have been clear that we shared what we have. That is what is pleasing to God. My prayer is that we will continue to share what we have. Thanks be to God. Amen.