

18th Sunday after Pentecost October 4, 2020

Growing in Generosity Sunday and Affirmation of Baptism

What is it about Jesus Christ as Lord that makes such a radical change in Paul? Just in the experience of knowing Jesus, Paul finds everything else he valued, that he thought God valued, as rubbish. The word used could be translated as excrement. It's literal crap.

All the WWJD bracelets (what would Jahweh do?), all the hours learning the intricacies of exactly what "work" you could do on the sabbath, what made you clean or unclean- able to approach God or not. The zeal in pursuing right living, of protecting the Jewish faith- in the face of knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord, of experiencing him, all that turned to nothing better to him than dung.

That experience sounds both wonderful and scary. To risk having our lives turned upside down by this Jesus who shows us the reality of who we are (sinners) and the fullness of who we can be in him (saints). How do we get this transformative experience of Jesus? Through the Holy Spirit, through Scripture- which Martin Luther called the cradle of Christ, but also, through those things all of us who are baptized have affirmed and which these five young women will affirm today.

- When we assemble with others who believe that Jesus is Lord- gathered to worship and for fellowship and care of one another.

- When we pray through the power of the Holy Spirit, raising before God the needs of our friends and neighbors. Raise our own doubts, fears, concerns, and in listening- hear the voice of Christ speaking to us.
- When we read scripture and encounter within its pages Jesus, God come down to us. Christ is there, I've met him. Reading the story of our faith and finding my story within it. Hearing my questions asked and answered. Finding again and again just what I need- when I need it. Words written, it seems, specifically for me. An inexhaustible source of wisdom and insight because it is a living document, because it is God's Word to us and that Word brings life.
- When we serve our neighbor- the one who is in need- and encounter in that person (as Matthew 25 reminds us)- Christ. When we are served by others in our need and encounter in them- Christ- come to give us daily bread, healing, comfort, mercy, grace.
- When we strive- in ways big and small- for justice and peace. When we show it in our families. Strive for it in our schools and at work. When we demand it of our cities and states and nation.

How do I know that it is Jesus I encounter in these things? Scripture has told me, because that presence of grace, love, and mercy could be no other than our Lord. Because this is who God is and who God calls us to be. That is the witness of our

ancestors of faith that they have passed down to us even unto this day. October 4, 2020.

Like Paul, when we have encountered that presence, even for a moment, truly had our eyes opened, we see that what we set our hearts on normally. The goals and dreams of accumulating stuff, even the goals of being a “good” person, or collecting experiences, all fall far short of what Jesus offers. Life, fuller, and more abundant than if we had a billion dollars, were liked by all, or saw every wonderful thing on God’s green earth.

The SEIA synod has a companion synod in Tanzania, Africa. The Pare diocese. Time and again I have heard the witness of those who have travelled there about how that experience has changed their view of the United States and our culture- radically and permanently. They speak of the generosity and hospitality of those residents of Tanzania that they have met. How they welcomed them into their homes and shared what they did have, which to American eyes was not much, but which was freely given. I imagine this kind of experience was like what Paul felt. That in that moment everything that he had held very dear- was suddenly exposed as nothing more than crap, useless junk.

I have seen people return from Tanzania and their whole attitude changes- towards money, and possessions, and what success is. And I know I like what I see in them. Wish it for myself.

When we have our eyes opened like Paul, we also see that we are continually on a journey. Always affirming our baptism. Affirming God's claim on our life and daily, actively, pursuing the heavenly calling to which we have been called and claimed by God in Jesus Christ. A calling which has come to us in our baptism and towards which these confirmands will promise to strive to fulfill -daily. As we have and do.

I pray for these confirmands and for you, that you would have this experience of God in Christ and that your way of seeing would be changed forever. That you would continue in your own life to affirm the calling to which you have been called. To renew your own striving for that experience of Christ in worship, prayer, scripture, and action. The bearing of good fruit that Jesus points to in the gospel reading.

That is also the desire of our Stewardship Team and our Church Council. So, as we come to the last month of our Capital Campaign- *Growing to Give*, we thought- with the focus this year on *Growing in Generosity to All*, to give you an opportunity to do just that. To be generous.

You can open the envelope we gave to you as you came in. Inside you will all find, through the personal generosity of the Stewardship Team and our Church Council, a \$5 bill. This is what I like to call a gift of grace- undeserved and unearned.

Our invitation, is to take these gifts of grace, this unearned abundance, and go out and be generous with them in the world. Do something meaningful with this

money. Think of some way you can make an impact on those in need- family, friends, neighbors, organizations, strangers.

You could consider pooling your gift with others, add some of your own resources or put in some sweat equity to create a larger gift to give.

The only rule is- you can't give it to St. John. Otherwise, it's up to you to consider the question, "How is God calling you to be generous with this gift of grace?" How might you be able to use this gift to provide daily bread for someone else?

As you do this over the next few weeks, we invite you to share the story of what you did with this gift of grace. We invite you to take pictures or video (with permission of those involved, if necessary) and share that with us. #sjlcgives. To write up a short article telling us what you did, how it impacted those you shared with, and what this whole process was like for you. Email that to us.

We do this not so you can brag, but so that we might be inspired, so that we might experience with you the joy to be found in generosity, in helping others who are in need.

In this way of sharing the abundance God has given us, we bear the fruit of the good news Jesus has brought to us. And in that sharing we receive the good news, that the God who created us, loves us enough to provide daily bread, enough for our needs and to share.

I look forward to hearing your creativity and your stories in the weeks ahead.