

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year C
10/16/16
Pentecost 22
Luke 18:1-8

Gratitude gives birth to generosity.

That's been the theme of the two really fine sermons we have heard the last two Sundays. "Gratitude gives birth to generosity." We heard Kevin Martin tell us how our generosity is often born of three sources of gratitude.

- Gratitude for having come through great suffering or difficult time with the knowledge that God is walking with us and loves us.
- Gratitude for having been shown amazing grace when we did not deserve it.
- Gratitude that our personal situations are so much better than so many of our brothers and sisters on this great planet.

And last week, we heard Steve tell us that gratitude can move us from that place of being in spiritual neutral into spiritual high gear. I won't soon forget that image of Steve in his brand new stick-shift Honda Civic waiting in fear for the light at the intersection of Marion and 2nd Ave in downtown Seattle. The nose of his little car pointing almost straight up hill. The light changes, he pulls his foot off the clutch, the car starts to roll backward, the driver behind him begins to blow his horn, and finally Steve jams the accelerator, leaving a skid mark that's still there to this day, as he rockets up the hill. Talk about a leap of faith. But that's what it takes to get out of spiritual neutral. A leap into the unknown. And the result is always gratitude. Gratitude leading to a generous response of the heart.

So I've been holding these images of gratitude giving birth to generosity all week. And then on Thursday, Zonnie and I attended a luncheon downtown for an organization called Global Partnerships. Global Partnerships focuses on the development of microfinance and entrepreneurship around the world as a way of combatting poverty and hunger. They do amazing work and I always leave their gatherings deeply inspired. The year the focus was on the work Global Partnerships is doing in Kenya.

The slums of Nairobi are among the poorest and most desperate places on earth. Disease is rampant because there is no running water and raw sewage runs through the streets. We heard story of a woman raising five children whose sole means of support had been selling an illegal form of alcohol. With the assistance of Global Partnerships, she

now leases a kind of Port-a-Potty which she charges a small fee or her neighbors to use and which she cleans and maintains. As the Port-a-Potties spread through the slum, sanitation is improving, disease is lessening, and entrepreneurs like this dear woman are finding hope.

At the conclusion of the video, the CEO of Global Partnerships said that he had recently been inspired himself by the spiritual writer Joanne Mace's use of the term "active hope." Hope, properly understood, is not a feeling. That's what optimism is: a feeling. Hope is better understood as a verb. When hope gets put into action, the result is what changes lives like this dear woman's in Nairobi.

Hope in action changes lives. I think that's what's going on in the parable of the unjust judge we heard this morning, the story of a poor widow persistently banging on the door of a hard-hearted judge, pleading for justice. This parable is often said to be about persistence in prayer. I think there is something to that, but I also think this is really a story of hope in action. This poor woman needed action. This poor woman needed justice. Where else would she get it except from this stubborn, tone-deaf judge? He was her only hope. And so she put her hope into action. Her hope for justice was realized because of her courage in the face of what at first seemed like hopelessness.

Hope in action changes lives. In Nairobi and in Bellevue. Right here at St. Thomas. We live in active hope in this community. This is a dynamic, transformational community where lives are being changed. Through Bible studies and prayer groups. Through hands-on ministry with men experiencing hopelessness and hungry people in need of nourishing food and a compassionate word at holiday time. Through beautiful music and worship. Through thoughtful teaching and preaching. Through compassionate pastoral care. This is a transformational community.

Yes, we live in active hope here. This hope isn't a feeling. It's a state of being. And for that I am so grateful. And Zonnie and I are going to express our gratitude for the hope we live into in this place in a tangible way next Sunday when we celebrate Ingathering Sunday. We are going to express our gratitude for everything I have just mentioned when we turn in our pledge card in support of the 2017 Financial Plan for Mission. Our pledge is also going to reflect our gratitude for the incredible love and support we have received from all of you during this very trying year of my illness. I have told friends near and far that I can't imagine what it would have been like to face this cancer diagnosis without the love and support of my St. Thomas family.

So the increase in our pledge will reflect our gratitude for this place and its wonderful people. It will reflect our gratitude for the visionary mission that we are all on

together. It will reflect our gratitude for the love of the Lord Jesus Christ as we experience it here every day.

As you consider your own pledge this week what will it reflect? Will it be a reflection of living your life in active hope like the woman in the parable and the mother in Nairobi? Will it be a reflection of gratitude for all the blessings of your life in the world and your life here at St. Thomas? Will it reflect gratitude for God's mercy and grace, as underserved as it is for us all? Will your pledge be a catapult moving you from spiritual neutral or first gear into third or fourth or even fifth year?

Your pledge is your investment in St. Thomas. Your pledge deepens your sense of participation and commitment and belonging.

So make your pledge from a grateful heart. Make your pledge in the spirit of commitment to do your part in the Jesus Movement right here at home. Maybe your pledge in active hope for the Kingdom of Heaven to come in your life right here and now. Make your pledge in gratitude for God's mercy and grace in your life. Amen.