

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Proper 8-B (27 June 2021)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

The Rev. Todd Foster

Time-stamp: <2021-06-26 Sat 17:12>

Collect

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, Psalm 130, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

1 Unity

Happy summer! The weather is warming, Rowan's campus is quiet, and beach traffic is filling the highways. The mission and ministry of St. Thomas' continues: celebrating the sacraments, feeding the hungry, and housing the homeless. We continue to work together in the unity of common prayer, shared work, and faithful giving.

As our collect today observes, our community is built on the twin foundations of scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. Though we come from all different walks of life, and see all kinds of things differently, it is our common faith that draws us together. Just like the earliest church, we are a collection of people who might not otherwise have ever had reason to meet or interact. But because of the Gospel, because of God's love for us, we live in unity and love for one another.

2 Epistle: A Collection

It is just this kind of unity and mutual caring that we see modeled in our epistle reading, from Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. Paul is writing about a fundraising campaign. Paul encourages the Christians in Corinth to continue setting aside money for that collection week by week so that they will be ready to fulfill their pledges. I want to note just a few things that Paul says about this collection.

First, Paul refers to this collection as a grace. That's the Greek word he uses, what the NRSV Bible translates "generous undertaking" and we know refers to the collection. We talk about sacraments like communion and baptism as means of grace. As they give to this collection, the Christians in Corinth are following in Jesus' self-emptying footsteps, bringing grace to their fellow-believers. In doing so, they also come to experience the grace of the Kingdom of God powerfully at work within them.

Second, Paul reminds the people in Corinth that no one has commanded them to give. The people are giving because of their own earnest desire to do so. Paul says it is the *desire* to give that makes a gift sacred. The number of zeros on the check is *nearly* irrelevant. The amount given is only *relevant* in that it is a tangible, authentic expression of a person's desire to take part in the grace of giving. So Paul reminds us that "the gift is acceptable according to what one has — not according to what one does not have." Our gifts reflect our readiness to recognize *all* that we have as God's and to entrust a *portion* of it to the needy or to others we see going about God's work.

Finally, Paul speaks of equality. The purpose of the collection Paul is taking up is for equality and fairness. Equality and fairness are the foundation of unity, Christian or otherwise. This particular gift was sparked by the prediction of a coming famine in Jerusalem. So as soon as they heard of it, this church in Corinth, way over in modern-day Greece decided they wanted to help care for their fellow believers. They knew they shared a unity with Christians around the world, based on scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. While the believers in Corinth enjoyed abundance, they would share with the believers in Jerusalem who were in need. There is always enough to go around in God's economy: but sometimes God entrusts more of it to certain parties precisely so that we might have opportunity to develop our capacity for giving, to grow into the fullness of God's design for us. The purpose of giving for the relief of others is not to burden anyone, but to bring unity by ensuring that no one has too little and no one has too much.

3 End: Now / not yet; Because God... therefore...

God's plan is still unfolding, and you and I are invited to be a part of it. I am particularly excited about the invitation to give to help jump-start Episcopal Community Services of New Jersey because ECS reminds me so strongly of the collection that Paul was administering on behalf of the churches in Asia minor. It is an opportunity for us, who live in *relative* abundance and ease, to contribute to bringing about *systemic change* for the well-being of Christians and their communities in under-resourced areas of our state. When you write "ECS" on the memo line of a check and put it into the collection plate or mail it in to St. Thomas' during our summer campaign, you affirm the unity of our Diocese and our care for one another across the state of New Jersey. You provide evidence that we are indeed one community, built upon the foundation of scripture and with Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

In giving to St. Thomas', to Kitchen of Hope, to Episcopal Community Services, to other worthy efforts and organizations where you see God at work, you are both giving and receiving grace, a sacrament, a sign of God's active presence in the world today. Giving is one of the ways that we love one another and raise our voices for the cause of unity.

Amen.