

**PROPER 22C -RCL**  
**Habbakuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4**  
**Psalm 37: 1-10**  
**2 Timothy 1:1-14**  
**Luke 17: 5-10**

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

In 1959, Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein produced a musical that has endured for decades. It was called *The Sound of Music*. It told the story of an honorable man, Captain Von Trapp, who was so devastated by the death of his wife, that he forbade the music she loved to be heard in his house ever again. But Maria, sent to be a governess to his children in his absence, began teaching them to sing the songs she loved, and changed the whole family's future. She had faith the size of a mulberry tree, as well as hope and love!

Today, as we gather our St. Paul's families from our 9 and 10:30 worship into a single service to celebrate our being children of God, I can't help but think of the lyrics of the song that Maria sings to comfort Liesl after they realize that Hitler is taking over Austria.

*"A bell is no bell 'til you ring it,  
A song is no song 'til you sing it  
And love in your heart  
Wasn't put there to stay –  
Love isn't love  
'Til you give it away."*

What does it mean to give love away? What does it mean to live so that what we leave behind ourselves -- when we move, when we die, when we change our schools or our zip codes -- lives on after us? In the end, we can only give what we have within us.

When the disciples say to Jesus: "Increase our faith!" Perhaps Jesus was really ticked. Perhaps what he wanted to say was: "Only you know what kind of faith you have in you. If you have any faith in God at all, you know that when you have faith you can accomplish miracles. When you have faith, you can share transforming hope and love which can change the world."

I think he might have added: "Don't be like someone who just does the job in front of them and says: Where is my reward? Or, look I did such a great job dealing with my responsibilities, give me a trophy. "

Instead, Jesus might smile, and say: Your faith in God allowed you to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless and the refugees, and comfort those who mourn, even when you were hurting and weak!

At St. Paul's you and I are part of our vision of abundance. The grace of God fills us with strength when we feel weak, and the glory of God prevents us from only asking "What's in it for me?" Thanks to the generosity of our Rummage Sale tribe, we have money to give away to those

in need. Thanks to those who bring food for the food cupboard and work at Face-to-Face, we feed the hungry. Thanks to our teachers and parents, we are introducing our children to the God who loves us through Godly Play and Youth Group. Thanks to our Room at the Inn folks we are readying ourselves to help shelter a refugee family.

Generosity is not only the manifestation of inner faith and love, it is also a powerful defense against one of the most insidious evils of our times. That evil can be the curated life of the electronic world.

In the curated life, we only receive news from our "Friends," social networks and newsfeeds that reinforce our own prejudices and preferences. In a curated life, all the dissonances are filtered out or bullied out. We are like the rich man who could not see Lazarus. We just don't notice. And when the reality of the world's need comes crashing through into our electronic lives, when violence or the hurricane or another disaster strikes, we wake up with a start.

Suddenly, there is a local or national outpouring of generosity – until the electronic down comforter of curated life settles on us once again. And if we choose that self-centered course, we then happily go back to what we choose to see and hear. As always, Jesus who loves us, invites us to generosity that goes far beyond curation.

What if, like A. J. Jacobs, who wrote *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*, we spent the next several months practicing gratitude for all the wonderful things in our lives, every single day? Yes, bad and difficult things also happen, but A.J. said on a recent interview that focusing on gratitude for a year changed his life. He started paying attention to things like paved roads, safe drinking water, supermarkets and fresh food, his family and friends, modern medicine and things he had taken for granted. He said that he woke up every day thanking God that he was still alive. He said that living this way changed the way he thought about the world and the way he understood himself in relation to the world. A.J. was deeply thankful and wished to share his gratitude with everyone he spoke to.

Out of such awareness comes a sense of abundance. Out of the grace of abundance comes generosity. And in a mysterious way, out of generosity comes faith and love. We are made by and for love and generosity.

This is the mystery of the Incarnation. God so loved the world that God came to dwell with us, to take on human flesh, to live and die as one of us. God, the source and beginning of love, in whom “we live and move and have our being,” is generosity itself. We have no need to fear. As we each

enter this world with the raw DNA of promise -- as a child of God -- we grow and give the world the gift of ourselves.

We give what we have. So as we grow and mature, we must pay careful attention to what we are building in our hearts and souls. What we practice is what we have to give.

If inside we there is nothing but fear and anxiety, that's what we have to offer the world. But if we have practiced love and faith, we can give that to the world instead. As Jesus told us, it is not what goes in to a person that is the problem, it is what comes out of a person that should concern us. So practicing generosity, Biblical thankfulness and love becomes a life-long task for us. May we practice them until they become second-nature to us -- overflowing out of our hearts like sunbeams on a summer day!

Today at St. Paul's we are paying attention to living generously by gathering, by enjoying a pancake brunch together 3made specially for us, and by paying attention to the ministries that allow us to express our own generosity. This morning, we'll have time to hear and think about how we practice generosity.

Perhaps now we can return to the Rogers and Hammerstein song and hear it with new ears. What about generosity? What about love? What about the faith in God Jesus says is simply part of our responsibility?

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***Amen.***