

**October 16, 2016 22nd Sunday after Pentecost
Gratitude and Generosity Dialogue Sermon**

**Genesis 32:22-31, Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14—5:4, Luke 18:1-8**

Grace and Peace to you, beloved in Christ. Amen.

Let me tell you about our sermon today... Really, better yet, let me tell you about our preachers, today! We have a group here at Hope that over the years has been called the Stewardship Committee. That's the group in a church, this church, any church, asked to lead us in being good stewards of the gifts we've been given.

Often stewardship gets defined narrowly, too narrowly, I'd say, as primarily about money, and then often, too often, people emphasize stewardship only in the fall, or when we're thinking about pledges, commitments of giving to the church for the coming year.

This year, in our congregation, the entire team is new.

When they got together for the first time, I joined them and we went around the table doing introductions and asking the question, Why are you part of this team, why did you say yes?

Oh my goodness, did they have responses!

Thoughtful, powerful, moving responses of being asked and saying yes and why stewardship matters.

And then they started brainstorming and two things became clear quickly:

1st, they questioned the name stewardship and said, really, we're about gratitude, gratitude for all the gifts we receive, and we're about generosity, our generous response—in money, and also in spirit, in time, in energy, let's call ourselves the gratitude and generosity team.

2nd, they said, let's not just focus on gratitude and generosity, once a year, but let's focus on it year round, a little at a time, even in the winter, even in the spring, even in the summer, and still in the fall.

This team is giving us as a congregation a gift, a tremendous gift, by wrestling intentionally with how they understand God's gifts and this life of gratitude and generosity.

Earlier this week four members of the Gratitude and Generosity Team came together, we prayed, we read the scripture for today, and talked about them, writing this sermon together.

Themes arose in the scripture: praying always, not losing heart, the persistence of that widow;

And the persistence of Jacob, wrestling through the night, being laid bare, not letting go, courageously asking for what he needed, struggling with God for that blessings, and receiving it;

We heard the promise and the comfort of the Psalm, and the words of Timothy about living as God's people.

Today I invite four of the six members of the team to join me in conversation.

They are Ann Wagner, Ann Beane, Molly Broin, and Beth Ubbelohde.

Kathy Kufus and John Hensrud are also part of the group.

Let's jump in: Timothy writes of faith and knowing from whom you learned faith. So... as a first question: **From whom did you learn faith?**

And, how do you wrestle with this faith as you grow through different seasons?

Beth: Baptist friend I'd known since 2nd grade, continually trying to save me. Inspired by her deep faith even at young age. Took it to heart. Discussions about differences. (Persistence, dialogue, conversations.) Then, a friend in nursing school, Mennonite Brethren, who took me farther.

Ann W: Priest who preached scary fire and damnation. Grandmother, deeply spiritual, devout, lived it, didn't fear death.

Molly: Baptized in the Episcopal church as a child (grandpa was a Episcopal priest, wrestling with his own faith), then baptized again as a Baptist, finally confirmed as a Lutheran, Heinz 57 variety Christian.

Base of faith, found again with Derek and his family. Struggle between two worlds: mortal world, and forever world. Faith as a relationship, seasons.

Here's another one: Timothy also has a line about belonging to God.

What in your faith creates a sense of belonging to God, and belong to God's people?

Ann B: Support through folks' divorce and son's suicide attempt.

Ann W: Eric bringing me here when started to date, warm and welcome, what church stands for with justice resonates, getting married here. Praying, how to get involved? Serving on this committee. First church ever to pledge to and make a commitment.

Molly: Being able to find this as my church home, church I grew up in, but when Derek and I moved into the cities we really wanted to find a church that is ours, not our parents, but ours.

And a last question:

How do you live with a generous spirit, and Why?

And, what temptations pull you from this life of generosity?

Beth: As I have gotten older and more financially secure, I along with my husband have been able to increase our giving to the church, and have been able to give to capital campaigns as they come up. We are fortunate that we will be able to increase our pledge this year. I also give to other agencies and have been able to sponsor a child through Child Fund for the past 15 years. Why? Because I feel so blessed and so fortunate.

Molly: What pulls me away is the struggle of living paycheck to paycheck, a feeling of scarcity. But then that encourages me to use my time and talents more than my checkbooks. Giving to other organizations, too. We know the struggle of making the choice to give. Simply giving.

Ann B: When my husband John was unemployed, generous, God took care us.

Ann W: Language of tithing, 10%, commitment to take care of family back at home, and also to give to the church and what I value.

Thank you, to each of you, thank you.

In a few minutes our worship will transition to a time of baptism.

A little one named Gus will be washed in the waters of God's promise, God's forever promise.

Gus' great grandma, Leona Reyelts ("Reilts") is an active member here, Gus' grandpa Dan was baptized here, his mom and family know this community well.

Today with these powerful stories, this witness, we've heard again about how God claims us and names us, holds us through the seasons of this life with an everlasting love that will never, ever let us go.

May the love of God surround you, Gus, and each of you, as together we learn to live generously, deeply rooted in Jesus the Christ. Amen.