

Thankful, Generous Hospitality

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Philippians 4: 4-7

Luke 1: 5-25

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Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

My friend and colleague Rev. Linda Yates has a term that she uses when she is preaching on a Sunday when the morning seems stuffed with many things.

She calls it a nano-sermon, when she only has about 5 minutes to get her message across.

A number of things are going on this morning... in the liturgical year, it is the first week of Advent.

We are wrapping up our stewardship program and having lunch afterwards.

Muriel, as our Mission & Service Enthusiast will introduce the Advent Calendar shortly.

And I am trying to tie together the readings, the over-arching advent theme of hospitality, hope and thankful generosity, all that in about 5 minutes.

I participated in serving breakfast at the Brunswick Street Mission yesterday.

As most of you know by now, with Margo Beveridge taking the lead, we have recently restarted this ministry.

We served 58 people yesterday, mostly men, but a few women as well.

They came in, some obviously very hungry, some cheerful, some cranky, some grateful, some resentful.

Karen Gibbons and I did most of the serving, and I tried to look each person in the eye as I brought their breakfast, even as some did not meet mine.

I experienced a variety of feelings over the 3 ½ hours I was there.

I was humbled... disturbed... grateful... saddened... but strangely encouraged and hopeful.

Humbled in the realization that I have rarely wondered where my next meal is coming from.

And I have never had to sleep in a shelter or on the streets.

And I was disturbed that in this city, there are those who do.

I was grateful that I wasn't one who came in to eat, even though I did sit down and eat with one man.

I was saddened and wanted to hear each one of their stories... even as I know that some of them probably would have lied to me.

I was encouraged that the dining room is clean and bright, with serviceable, but matching tables and chairs, pictures of many of them participating in different events on the wall... there is a bathroom and a phone available.

The evidence of radical hospitality was there... some might say that it doesn't matter what kind of surrounding these men and women encounter, but I disagree.

Those surroundings demonstrate that these people are our brothers and sisters, children of God and we might be the only pleasant encounter they have Saturday morning.

I am hope-filled because despite numerous challenges over the last number of years, the Brunswick Street Mission continues to fulfill its mission to some of the most vulnerable in our society, those who fall through the cracks.

And I am hope-filled that you have responded so generously with your time and money to help this ministry remain active.

It is a demonstration of how much you care when your hearts are touched.

And despite everything, we can rejoice in the Lord, always and be filled with gratitude.

The reading from Luke tells the story of the angel Gabriel visiting Zechariah who told him that his wife would give birth to a son in her old age.

A son who would grow up to be John the Baptist, whose ministry and mission paved the way for his cousin Jesus.

What if Zechariah had let his fear and terror overwhelm him?

What if he had run screaming from the temple?

What if he simply dismissed the angel's message as impossible?

What if his fear and terror made him create such an inhospitable environment that the angel simply went elsewhere?

Who knows?

What we do know is that he heard the message, despite his fear, he welcomed the message, even though a child in his old age would radically change his life.

He heard the message of hope for the future in the angel's words.

The angel's message of new life will be lived out in our time and place.

This advent, what is birthing in the faith community?

What is birthing that may be disturbing... and encouraging... saddening and hope-filled.

Will we welcome it or run from it.

Yesterday morning was a powerful demonstration of hope lived out... even in desperate circumstances.

I was filled with gratitude that I have the opportunity to be in communion with both the people who came to eat and those who cooked, served and cleaned up.

I am not sure how my gratitude will be lived out in the days ahead.

When the mad rush of church activities at this time of year threatens to make me forget why we the church has the season of Advent.

It's a time of preparation.

A time for us to reflect on the theme of hospitality as we make ready to welcome the Christ child into our midst.

A time to reflect on how the church lives out Jesus' mission that began so long ago.

Let us enter the season with thankful, generous hospitality.

Thanks be to God, amen.