

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, October 9, 2022
18th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 28/Year C
2023 Annual Stewardship Campaign
First Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c
Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-15
Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19
Sermon Title: “Hope Happens Here – Week 1”

Theme

It's a miracle! Multiple miracles! The waters of holy baptism have healed us. The body and blood of Jesus in holy communion have made us clean. We have died with Christ and been raised with him. For all this we have returned to offer thanks. From this place we are sent on our way rejoicing to share the good news.

Texts:

First Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

¹Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ²Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

⁸But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. ¹³But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" ¹⁴So

he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

^{15a-c}Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, ⁹for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

¹³if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

¹⁴Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Sermon

Welcome to our 2023 Annual Stewardship Campaign. It will be four weeks long and comes with the theme, "Hope Happens Here."

Why the **2023** Annual Stewardship Campaign, you ask? For as long as I've been pastor here at Zion, the Give Table has held an annual stewardship campaign in the fall, so that it, the Give Table, has an idea of what our offerings will be so that it can prepare the 2023 budget that you will vote on at the end of January. Makes sense right?

Why a stewardship campaign *at all*, you might ask? Because we are sinners and most of us need to be reminded of our need to give back to God through the church.

- 1) Worship
 - 2) Disciple
 - 3) Serve
 - 4) Fellowship (Body of Christ)
- All to the glory of God

You see, the church is the creation of Jesus Christ our Lord and it was his design that all Christians be attached to a local church so that we can 1) worship, 2) disciple (i.e., learn what it means to be a Christian), and 3) serve by living out our lives of discipleship to the Lord Jesus through the ministries of the church, and 4) enjoy the fellowship of believers, also known as the Body of Christ, as we do the other three. We do this to God's glory. This is not new; the church has been doing this for about 2000 years.

Why "Hope Happens Here"? Because "hope" is all any of us really have. Hope in this moment; hope for tomorrow; hope for all our days, and the days of our families and friends; and hope for our eternal future. And as I see, and as I hope to convince you, "Hope Happens Here." Hope happens in other places, but we should expect that "Hope Happens Here" within the Body of Christ.

God created us and all there is out of God's great love. And God gave us, human beings, one gift that he did not give any other created thing, and that thing was the

gift of intellect – God gave us the gift to choose to love God back through the living of our lives according to those four points on the screen.

But there is this thing, the human condition, which is almost as old as creation itself. We get thinking that we are responsible for our own individual success and well-being and we alone get to decide how we use "our" resources of Time, Talent, and Treasure, those three aspects of personal stewardship that we often speak of in the church. Those resources are gifts from God, and everybody gets them to one degree or another.

So I want to remind us that we are creations of our loving God, each one of us, along with all the gifts we have. Some of us were born into families that valued higher education and so we went off to college, often at our parent's expense. Some of us were born into families that valued skilled labor, and we went off and learned a trade. Some of us are retired. Some of us are still trying to figure out how to make a living. For all of us, it is by the grace of God:

- that we were born,
- when we were born,
- where we were born,
- to whom we were born,
- and that we were born with God-given spiritual gifts.

All this to remind us that we had nothing to do with our own creation.

Throughout scripture, we are reminded of this – we came in with nothing and we will go out with nothing; we are dust and to dust, we shall return; and let's face it, unless we become famous, it is the rare person that will be remembered after three generations. I know, to be confronted with the truth like that is pretty humbling, but I'd rather know the truth and respond to it than be deceived and be surprised by it.

Throughout scripture, we are presented with images that God gives us to order our lives.

The shepherd is one – the sheep don't belong to the shepherd, the shepherd is just the one who cares for them on behalf of the owner.

And the steward is another – when we go to a fancy restaurant and we want a nice bottle of wine, we ask the steward to make a recommendation. The steward doesn't own the wine, the steward manages the wine on behalf of the owner of the restaurant.

We, as God's creation, were given spiritual gifts, potentialities, in the church we call it "Time, Talent, and Treasure," that God intends for us to develop for the sake of the Body of Christ, and I dare say the whole world. We don't own the results of our own productivity any more than the shepherd owns the sheep or the steward owns the wine – but that teaching often falls on deaf ears.

There are probably some members of the church that think the church is here to serve them, and in some aspects it is.

This last week we hosted a funeral for Doug Bortmas, and afterward, we hosted a fellowship meal for the family, many of whom are members. Why? Because we want to be faithful to our call as the Body of Christ and minister to our own in their time of sorrow. And since *Hope Happens Here*, we as their church family want to do what we can to bring them hope.

And next weekend will be our monthly Food Distribution where we feed over one hundred families. Why? Because we want to be faithful to our call to be Christians and minister to the hungry, and because, as the Body of Christ, we want others to know that *Hope Happens Here*.

On Saturdays, we are led in our worship by our Saturday Singers, and on Sundays, we are led by our fine choir. They elevate the spirit of all in attendance. None of them are paid – they sing because it is one of the ways they are faithful to their calls to be Christians using their talents to lead the rest of us in our worship and as a result, God is glorified. Why here? Because they find that *Hope Happens Here*, and leading others in their worship may help them realize that *Hope Happens Here* too.

As I said earlier, the church is the place and method that Jesus Christ gave us to live out our lives of discipleship. We join a church so that we can be a part of a thing that is bigger than ourselves, and serve through the community and fellowship with the Body of Christ.

Throughout scripture, God has required that a share of our productivity be returned to God – to the Temple and Synagogue in the Hebrew Testament, and the Church in the Christian Testament.

Does God need our Time, Talent, and Treasure? No! The fact is, God doesn't need us at all! But remember, God created us out of God's great love. That great love includes giving us that gift of intellect to choose to love God back. And God loves us so much that God allows us to express our love and thankfulness back to God by doing God's work with our hands. And when we do that, do Christian things, we give God glory, and God delights in us, and we become know as the place where *Hope Happens*.

In the First Reading, Naaman, the commander of the army of Aram, contracted leprosy, a disgusting skin disease leprosy and a hopeless diagnosis. With the goodwill of the King of Aram at his disposal, he tried everything to cure his disease but had no success.

A young Israelite girl, a captive of the Arameans, was heard saying that it was a pity that he couldn't see the great prophet and man of God, Elisha, because he would know what to do. She knew where hope happened. A letter along with a pile of treasure was sent by the King of Aram to the King of Israel, enemies mind you, to implore the King of Israel to arrange a meeting between his valued commander Naaman and Elisha. It eventually happened, and that is where the story gets amusing and so like us.

Elisha told Naaman to go wash in the Jordan River seven times and he will be healed. That's it! Easy-peasy, right? But Naaman was full of national pride for Aram and was prejudiced against Israel and wasn't going to wash in the filthy Israelite Jordan River. His pride got in the way, and he got his feelings hurt, and he almost lost out on hope for the healing he sought. It wasn't the water in the Jordan River, it was hope in and obedience to God. And once Naaman obeyed the prophet, he got the healing he hoped for.

In keeping with the leprosy theme, in the Gospel Reading, Jesus encountered ten lepers! . How they knew who he was is a mystery to me, but they recognized him and sought him out because they knew he was all the hope they needed for healing.

All Jesus did was speak to them. He told them to go show themselves to the priests. You see, one isn't clean until the priests declare one clean.

But notice, Jesus never touched them. Luke recorded that "as they went, they were made clean." And while they obediently did what he said and ran to the priests, and presumably all noticed their healing, one turned back, threw himself at the feet of Jesus, and thanked him and praised God. And, Luke points out, he was a Samaritan, an unclean, despised, half-breed of the Jews. At the end of that story Jesus said to the man, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." I wonder, wasn't the man healed already? But Jesus points out that the man's "faith has made him well." Perhaps there is a difference between physical healing and being made well. Perhaps this is the difference between being hopeless and hopeful.

Do you think that conclusion applies to personal stewardship? I do. *Hope Happens Here* at Zion Lutheran Church, but how can it if we cease to exist, cease to provide the ministry that so many in this community have come to rely on. And how can we remind folks that *Hope Happens Here* if we cease to exist. Now you might think that I am threatening, I am not. Within a stone's throw of us there are three church that have closed in the last couple of years: Christ Church Presbyterian, New Covenant Church of the Nazarene, and St. George Byzantine Catholic Church. And let me remind you, my mother's church in the shadow of Lutheran Hospital in Ft. Wayne closed forever during the pandemic.

I think we often hope for the wrong things in life. We get an illness or a loved one gets an illness and what we hope and pray for is physical healing. I believe that what Jesus taught here is that we shouldn't get stuck in this mortal temporal world. Oh I know, this is really all we know. But Christians trust in the promises of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and so while we live in this mortal temporal world, our hope is in the promise of eternal life with God.

In the Second Reading, Paul taught Timothy that the Body of Christ needs to constantly be reminded of their responsibility. And so I am here before you to remind you that we should choose to give God appropriate thanks for all God's many blessings to us.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

So we are the beloved creation of our God and Father. God gives us all that we have, and along with those gifts, God allows us to return glory and honor to God, by the way we live our lives, and that includes the good use of our God-given resources; Time, Talent, and Treasure. And not only does God require a share of our productivity to be given back to God through God's church, but God also intends to prosper our offerings. And when we are faithful, and even grow in our faithfulness, we also grow in faith, hope, and love, and we, the Body of Christ known as Zion Lutheran Church, is known as the place where *Hope Happens*.

Prayer

Loving God, we are so over this pandemic. We miss our members, young and old, who have not returned yet. We miss the ministry we used to do together as the Body of Christ. Now the country is experiencing inflation, and the world has become a tense place. We want to have faith in you and you alone, but we are afflicted with the human condition – we turn in on ourselves, rather than toward you. Drive out fear and insecurity. Challenge us in our faith, so that we build our character, and remind us of our responsibility to be a place where *Hope Happens*. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.