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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, October 30, 2022
Reformation Sunday/21st Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 31/Year C
2023 Annual Stewardship Campaign
First Reading: Isaiah 1:10-18
Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12
Gospel Reading: Luke 19:1-10
Sermon Title: “Hope Happens Here – Week 4”

Theme

“God loves us all, both big and small,” a child’s verse declares. The sins of the world are covered. We are able to stand tall before God our righteous judge because in the person of Jesus “salvation has come to this house”—to our house today. In Christ Jesus God seeks us out to save us.

Texts:

First Reading: Isaiah 1:10-18

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
¹¹What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.

¹²When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more;

¹³bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.

¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁵When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.

¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
¹⁷learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

¹⁸Come now, let us argue it out,
says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. ⁴Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

¹¹To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

¹[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." ⁹Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Sermon

And now the exciting conclusion to the 2023 Annual Stewardship Campaign, entitled, "Hope Happens Here."

I am going to begin with the conclusion, and the conclusion is that the Give Table has two very specific requests, challenges, asks. One will cost you nothing, and the other will cost you a little.

Those of you who were around back in 2013 will remember the 2014 Annual Stewardship Campaign entitled "Raise the Roof." I had only been pastor here for less than a year when the numerous maintenance problems the church building had were pointed out. The primary concern was that some of our roofs leaked, the north parking lot was crumbling, and then several other less significant issues needed to be addressed. "Raise the Roof" was a three-year capital improvement campaign in which we asked for \$250,000, and we got over \$300,000 as I recall.

There was a prioritized list that was checked off as the money to fix the issues came in. And after all of the issues were fixed, Council moved the excess (who has excess money in the church?) of nearly \$40,000 to a restricted "Building Fund."

And while it is generally true what I told you last week, our only source of revenue is the generosity of our members, because of the smart leadership of your church, especially our treasurer, Art Roden, Council added to that restricted fund, our Paycheck Protection Program funds of \$39,667 and reimbursement from the Bureau of Workers Comp of \$24,560, and a one-time gift of \$14,150 for a total of \$118,044.

However, over the last several years, we had to replace the furnace and air conditioner unit in Crossroads (\$18,724), the unit over Alber Hall (\$7,880), all four air conditioners here in the Sanctuary (\$27,465), and replaced the electronic control system and mechanical parts that manage the internal environment in most of the building (\$50,280), and several other costly repairs on the remaining old units, all totaling \$108,614 – all without having to come to the congregation for more money. You're welcome!

But, alas, those funds are nearly depleted, and our old building needs constant maintenance and repair. For example, the HVAC unit that controls the environment for the school is currently misbehaving. It is 23 years old (life expectancy is 20 years), the replacement cost is \$28,448, and the repair cost is \$4,262. We have elected to repair the unit even though it is past its life expectancy because we only have \$35,362 left in the Building Fund, and we cannot deplete that fund because we never know what tomorrow will bring. For example, the HVAC unit over the library is currently not working, but in addition to it not working, it is coming through the roof!

So, the Give Table requested that we add a line to our weekly offering envelope that is for donations to the "Building Fund." It is critically important and good stewardship that we keep up this beautiful old resource out of which we do ministry. The Give Table asks that you consider making regular donations to the Building Fund.

Let me make something perfectly clear. Your weekly tithes and offerings to the church, which pay for our normal and customary expenses, are critically important too. Please do not simply take some money from your weekly tithes and offerings and move them to some other fund.

The Give Table is aware we give you many occasions throughout the year to give to the several ministry opportunities this church takes on, not to mention the list on the white envelope in the envelope rack in front of you. However, we are also aware that our members are not only exceedingly generous, but have superior intellect, and know that you are smart enough to figure out what ministries you want to support – above and beyond your regular support of the mission of your church - and which ones you don't.

So that is the part that will cost you. On to the part that will not cost you.

Steve Rogers, the Leader of the Give Table has written in Eye On Zion about the concept he calls "Legacy Giving." Legacy Giving is essentially generously remembering the church in your estate. Presumably, you support your church during your lifetime and it has meant a lot to you as the place out of which you lived out your life of discipleship. By remembering your church in your estate, you literally continue to give to your church perpetually after you have passed on! How

great is that? And unless you designate otherwise, your estate gift will be put in the Endowment Fund where it will continue to grow infinitum, supporting the ministries of this church that are above and beyond the normal scope of this congregation's budget.

Allow me to give you some actual examples. Zion actually has two endowment Funds: an endowed scholarship fund and a traditional church endowment fund.

The Scholarship Endowment Fund was established years ago by two people I never met, Laretta Raithel and the Rev. George Alber. Since 2000, the combined Scholarship fund has awarded \$183,160 in scholarship awards to members of Zion Lutheran Church! How amazing is that?!? Though they died many years ago, their names are remembered and spoken here every year because of their generosity.

Though Karen Hanousek was not able to worship with us often during the pandemic, before, she was a fixture here. Though not from the Mahoning Valley, when she moved here with her husband's work, she put down roots and got involved in ways I did not know about until she passed.

The marriage didn't last and Karen was soon a single mom single-handedly raising her four children on a teacher's income. Karen was a home economics teacher by training back in the day when home economics teachers taught young girls how to sew and cook. But Karen put her teaching skills and love for her students to use in what I would say were non-traditional ways. She saw the real-world needs of her lower socio-economic class students and taught them how to survive in the real world. And not only did she teach, but she generously provided for them – clothes, food, and school supplies - whatever they needed. Karen was known to take food to her student's homes on weekends decades before the weekend backpack of food idea had started.

Her children told me Christmas in their home was more about giving than receiving. All this Karen did in front of and with the full knowledge and participation of her four children. Whether she did it intentionally or not, her children were watching, and while they grew up modestly, they were taught how to live generously.

Karen was always a person of great faith. She would do her devotions every day, but more than a quiet faith, Karen put her faith into action. When I came to Zion ten years ago, there was no event from choir to live nativity to food distribution that she didn't participate in. And she also participated in groups and activities in the community that she felt strongly about too.

Just this last week, Zion, Karen's beloved church home, the place she lived out her life of discipleship, received a check for \$5,892 from Karen's estate because she made Zion a beneficiary of a life insurance policy.

Others, like Myron Roh, Nils Johnson Sr., and his wife, Jan Johnson, have left sizeable Legacy gifts, and there are others as well.

I didn't take the time to count them, but I am willing to bet that in my ten years of being Zion's pastor, I have probably done around 150 member funerals. *It was at this very moment in my sermon preparation that we got the call that Gisela Shuster died. She will be the 16th funeral we will host, the 14th member to die in the last twelve months.* If every one of those beloved members left their church just \$1000 that would be an additional \$150,000 added to our Endowment Fund. But honestly, we didn't ask. So today, I am challenging all of us to remember our church in our estates.

Did you know that when a pastor of the ELCA resigns or retires from a call, that pastor must leave the membership of that church he or she has served? That said, Carol and I have already talked about Legacy Giving and we commit to giving at least \$5000 to Zion out of our estate, no matter where we pass or when that day comes. And I challenge you to do the same. Some of us, maybe Carol and I, will want to and be able to do more! Any amount will perpetuate your devotion to your Lord, through his church.

Now, as a public service announcement, I spoke to Nils Johnson Sr's grandson, Nils Peter Johnson, also an attorney in the firm of Johnson and Johnson, and he told me that to make this kind of generosity happen after someone passes, requires that it be written into that one's will. So if that is your intention, please see your attorney.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

I never met Myron Roh or Nils Johnson Sr., but because they were human, they were sinners in need of redemption, and by the reputation of their faith stories, I am sure that their sins, though like scarlet, were made like snow, to quote the LORD from First Reading from Isaiah. And I can only presume that they believed that their local church, Zion, was their Lord's gift to them, a place where they could live out their lives of discipleship. And it must have meant enough to them to remember their church in their estates. I feel the same way. I hope you do too.

Prayer

Loving God, we give you thanks for the faithful lives who passed through this great old church. We pray for your blessing on it for the sake of those who continue to pass through it. It is by the presence of your Holy Spirit in our lives that we can live lives worthy of your call. Continue to give us the fortitude to fulfill that call by doing good works of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified. We ask this in his name. Amen