

Fifth Weekend of Easter (RCL/C): "Love One Another!": Good Samaritans of All Sorts  
John 13:31-35; Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6  
May 18-19, 2019  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

One of the people we're praying for this week is Melissa. She grew up in this faith family but moved out of state a long time ago. Her mom contacted us a few days ago to request prayer because this coming week Melissa is going to give an incredible gift: she is going to donate a kidney to an acquaintance. Why? Because the Holy Spirit inspired her to reach out and offer herself as a possible donor. The man with the kidney problems resisted at first, but Melissa insisted. She was tested and came up as a match. Melissa's belief is that God is asking her to give this man the organ that he needs and she has. Period. End of discussion. Wow!

*[Jesus said,] "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)*

Giving an organ is an extreme example of love. When I served as a hospital chaplain in a trauma center, I was also struck by the open-heartedness of surviving family members who had tragically lost a relative out of the blue and in the midst of their grief agreed to donate their loved one's organs. Hospital staff wear buttons and maybe you've seen the bumper sticker that says: "For heaven's sake don't take your organs to heaven, we need them here!" The decision to donate postponed the inevitable for the grieving family because their loved one had to be kept on life support and then undergo surgery for the harvesting of the organs. But the gift goes both ways, since the family has the comfort of knowing their loved one's organs help others gain a new lease on life, maybe making dialysis unnecessary or hastening the healing of a burn patient or giving the gift of a future for cardiac patient who needs a new heart or the person with cystic fibrosis who needs a new pair of lungs.

Many of you have heard the story of Meta Querns' brother Paul Starke , who became the recipient of a new heart – almost 30 years ago? Paul did a lot of good in this world and in this faith family both before and after his transplant. We pray that will be true for the man scheduled to receive Melissa's kidney, too. About 20 years ago we lost a 12-year-old, Katie, who was waiting for a liver transplant that never came. Bottom line? The generosity of heart involved in organ donations isn't small potatoes. It's a matter of life and death. My driver's license states that I'm willing to be an organ donor, should the occasion arise. I encourage you to think about it, too, if you're young and healthy enough and haven't yet made that choice.

Most days it's not a matter of whether we're willing to give a body part away. It's more like: are we willing to be inconvenienced, to veer from our plans, to be late for an appointment, to be late for work, to be late for dinner, to give the gift of precious time, to run the risk of being taken advantage of if the need isn't genuine?

There was an article in the paper last week entitled "They Can Find a Book, or a Missing Man."<sup>1</sup> In Manhattan there was a 3 day conference for librarians on early childhood literacy. In distracted moments the participants quietly, sneakily, pulled out their phones (as many of us might do). One of them has the Citizen app on her phone and saw an alert for a missing 79 year old man. It gave his description and said he was last seen  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile away from the conference location. A couple hours later that librarian and some of her friends left the conference and recognized the man as he repeatedly stepped off the sidewalk and into the street, craning his neck to look up at the tall Midtown buildings. I don't know what they had planned to celebrate the end of their 3 day continuing ed experience, but whatever it was they put it on ice and helped this stranger. Turns out he spoke French instead of English, so they used Google Translate to strike up a conversation. They treated him to Starbucks, then flagged down a police officer in Herald Square

who was able to unite the fellow with his family. Hopefully their lasting memory of NYC and of the U.S. will be the unexpected kindness of strangers. When it was raining, so to speak, the librarians kept this visitor dry under the umbrella of love.

Another story that caught my eye and captured my heart was in a column entitled “Border Agents And a Good Samaritan.”<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Kristof who wrote it isn’t afraid to quote Scripture, and in this column he intersperses St. Luke’s story of the Good Samaritan with a description of how Teresa Todd, a single mom who works in a law office in West Texas, stopped to help 3 young people flagging her down for help on a Texas highway. “Turns out they were 2 twenty-something brothers and an 18-year-old sister, Esmeralda, who had fled violence in El Salvador to supposed safety in Guatemala where their friends ended up being murdered and a gang leader wanted to conscript Esmeralda as his “girlfriend.” They fled again, this time to the U.S., and by the time they flagged down Ms. Todd, Esmeralda was suffering from starvation, dehydration and some other illness that had her on the verge of kidney failure.

Teresa Hall made the decision to override her sense of caution and stop to see what they needed. She invited them into her car to warm up, then texted lawyer friends to sort out how she could get safely get this woman medical care. Meanwhile a sheriff’s deputy pulled up behind her and radioed for a Border Patrol officer who detained Teresa for 3 hours in a holding cell, taking her possessions. Kristof wrote:

By stopping to help a stranger, Todd may have saved a life -- [Esmeralda ended up being hospitalized for 5 days] but this also got her arrested.

Teresa Todd was released, but there’s still the possibility she’ll be charged with a felony for helping migrants. She’s not sorry for what she did.

“I think it’s the right thing to help those in need. That’s what I learned from my parents. That’s what I learned in church.”

*Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds... Then [the Samaritan] put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him...." [Jesus asked,] "Which of these three do you think was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37)*

It is the right thing to help those in need. It may not be the convenient thing or the expedient thing or even the popular thing, but it is the **right** thing. Jesus quoted the Book of Leviticus (19:18) and commanded us not just to, "Love your neighbor," but "Love your neighbor **as yourself.**" (Mark 12:31) That's a tall order, treating each other like we want to be treated! But oh, no, that wasn't raising the bar high enough! Then He had to add, "Just **as I have loved you**, you also should love one another." (John 13:34b) **How** much does He love us? "**This** much!" [Arms spread wide, as on the cross....]

*"By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:35) Most love is expressed through generosity. Some give organs, some give money, some give time: the time it takes to stop your car and let someone back out of a parking space on Main St., even though you don't need it. For others it's the gift of risk: not being sure if someone's need is legit, but stopping to find out and then helping despite the legal jeopardy or financial cost. Back to basics: "It is the right thing to help those in need." Jesus says so. Amen

<sup>1</sup>Azi Paybarah, "They Can Find a Book, or a Missing Man," *New York Times* (May 17, 2019), A23.

<sup>2</sup>Nicholas Kristof, "Border Agents And a Good Samaritan," *New York Times* (May 16, 2019), A23.