

Fourth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "Look Who's Doing the Work!!"
Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
July 2-3, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Eleanor Roosevelt was First Lady from 1933 to 1945, so she certainly wasn't one of our country's "founding mothers," but she sure is one of the women who helped to shape our nation, drawing her husband's attention to those in greatest need of support from those who served in the halls of power. Eleanor was brilliant, a student of many things, including history. FDR helped to make history, with Eleanor at his side, playing to his strengths and minimizing his weaknesses. In this tell-all, show-all, 24 hour news cycle era that we live in, it's hard for us to imagine that many Americans didn't realize their president spent much of his day in a wheelchair, the result of his battle with polio years before. There was an agreement between White House and media that the President would not be photographed in the wheelchair or even with his crutches, an agreement that was honored over many years. In this way FDR projected an image of physical strength, complementing his political power and intellectual know-how.

Eleanor saw the other side of her spouse's story: chronic physical pain, fatigue, the determination and grit he exhibited day in and day out, disciplining himself to overcome or accommodate his physical limitations. She had health issues of her own, so she knew what she was talking about when she said something along the lines of, "Most of the important things in this world were done by people who didn't feel especially well on the day they accomplished it."

And **why** did those folks push beyond their own physical or emotional pain to do great things? Because the **need** was so great, and they knew it! They felt a sense of **urgency** that wouldn't allow them to procrastinate until "some day" when they **might** feel better. The nation's

need, the neighbor's need, compelled them to reach **deep**, to reach **beyond** themselves, to give of themselves that others might live a more abundant life.

In today's Gospel Jesus paints a picture of **Kingdom urgency** for His followers:

²... "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." (Luke 10)

In other words, it will be dangerous because some people won't like what you have to say, but we can't wait until it's safe.

⁴"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road."

"Time's a'wastin', people!" Don't take any sightseeing detours, don't let your mission get derailed, no idle chitchat, get down to work! Wilting souls are waiting to be revived! Lives are hanging in the balance! Sicknesses of body and spirit have hung around too long! Humanity needs us to clean house! Demons and disease and despair need to be sent packing! Let the light of Christ shine through you, brightening the darkness and chasing away the shadows! What are you waiting for??

There's a great echo of this Gospel message in the letter from the Galatians that we've also heard today:

⁹...let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. (Gal. 6)

Those words "whenever we have an opportunity" can pose a problem, depending on how we interpret them. Does the moment of opportunity have to be wide as a barn door for us to walk through? Do all the stars in the heavens have to align? Do all our home projects have to be completely buttoned up before we can give a couple hours to our Property Committee's grounds crew? Do pigs have to fly before we'd consider becoming part of our Sunday School teaching

team? What would it take to bump up on our list of life priorities time for worship and time to serve in a ministry, any ministry, of our faith family?

When it comes to giving the gifts of time and talent, we all know there are only 24 hours in a day, and some of those are reserved for rest, eating, play, and pre-retirement, working for the paycheck that keeps a roof over our heads and food on the table. We can't manufacture more time, but we **can** reprioritize our schedule. I saw a no-nonsense suggestion on a greeting card recently. It was a list of all sorts of ways to live life more fully. "Not enough time in your day to do the things you enjoy?" it asked. "Watch less TV." Stark. Simple. But am I willing to do it? If I have no time for things I consider **most** important, am I willing to identify what is **less** important and demote it, sideline it, unprioritize it?

When it comes to giving the gift of money, we all know it doesn't grow on trees. But if we truly believe God gives many gifts **to** us so they can flow **through** us to others, we will be glad and grateful to be blessed to be a blessing, and we won't surround our money with "Mine! All mine!" barbed wire. I know I'm "preaching to the choir" since this is a holiday weekend and you are present for worship anyway, either in-person or on-line! But if the Lord isn't asking a bit more of us than we're willing to give in the moment, if the Lord isn't asking us to stretch time, talent or treasure we consider in too short supply, if the Lord isn't challenging us to reach **down** deeper and to reach **out** further, then we're probably not listening closely enough.

⁹...let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

I'll never be able to read those verses from Galatians without thinking of Hank Lay. True, Hank was a pastor, but our call to service comes through Holy Baptism, not ordination, and I'm quite sure Hank would have acted the same self-giving way even if he were in a different

profession. It was January of this year, and we needed a co-chair to serve with Letitia Jensen on Justice & Peace and on Council. We didn't consider asking Hank because we knew he was undergoing treatment for metastatic cancer and sometimes didn't feel all that well. But, "Most of the important things in this world have been done by people who didn't feel especially well on the day they accomplished it," and Hank was no exception. When he was brought into the brainstorming conversation about a Justice & Peace co-chair he simply asked, "Whattabout me?" What could we say to that??

When Pastor Mark was hospitalized in April, so was Pastor Hank and so was our custodian Don. Pastor Mark had another visitor so I set off to see Don and Hank, who happened to be on the same unit, by God's grace. I bumped into Hank in the hallway, on his way to pay a visit to Don, so I joined him. Hank himself was hospitalized for the spread of cancer to his brain, but he was giving of himself, regardless. Hank & Marilyn's ministry among us has included their presence at almost every single funeral and memorial service we've had since they joined. They'd never met most of the people who'd died or most of the families who grieved, but that didn't make a difference. These were brothers and sisters in the family of faith, and they deserved accompaniment in their time of loss.

I think Hank would be fine with my sharing this, because it reminds us of our Savior's call to all that we be more generous, more faith-filled, more bold in proclaiming and living out the Good News. There are other folks, as well, who embody this level of devotion. How often I see those who serve, either up front "on stage," so to speak, or way off in the wings, where there is very little acclaim and no applause. I can't help but notice that it is often those who carry the heaviest burdens on their hearts or in their bodies who are the first to step forward to help in any

way. They make me think of our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Our Father who sees in secret will reward you."

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Let's ask, let's pray, as the Lord says, and let's also step forward ourselves as laborers to bring in the Kingdom harvest. Entertain the possibility that the Lord is calling **you** to teach our 5th and 6th grade Sunday Schoolers, or calling **you** to be a camera operator during worship, or calling **you** to help us set up outdoor worship, or calling **you** to share your time, talent, or treasure in a fuller way. Just remember: the stars aren't going to realign themselves on their own for that to happen. What the Lord desires, the Lord empowers. But we have free will, and we need to choose to **make** the "...opportunity... [to] work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." ⁹"...let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham