

## Sermon 20210627 Pentecost 5B Synod – Matt Steinhauer

As congregations are coming out of the pandemic...  
 ...and trying to reengage in what was “normal routines” ...  
 ...fifteen months ago...  
 ...it is very apparent that needs are different...  
 ...and congregations have changed...  
 ... over the last year...  
 ...as a gathered people....  
 ...and it may be time to do some soul searching...  
 ...and reassessment of God’s mission for us.

In Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth...  
 ...that we heard as our second reading...  
 ...I hear him giving advice to a church....  
 ...that may be in the same boat...  
 ...that many of us find ourselves in:

*<sup>10</sup>And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—<sup>11</sup>now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.*

At Faith Lutheran Church, in Lebanon, TN...  
 ...where I serve as parish pastor...  
 ...LAST YEAR....  
 ...we not only BEGAN to provide lodging....  
 ... for disaster volunteers...  
 ...we were excited to do so!

Within a couple weeks of March 2020 tornadoes...  
 ...we had set up a volunteer camp...  
 ...that would house up to 40 volunteers.

It was about the time the world was locking down.

With the quick agreement of our relatively small congregation...

...to get set up and start serving...

...I would say we certainly “DESIRED” to do something!

Fifteen months later...

...it appears volunteers are ready to travel....

... to help people in need..

...all over our Southeastern Synod.

For us in Lebanon, Tennessee...

...now it is time to finish doing it...

...so that our eagerness...

... may be matched by completing it...

... according to our means.

I imagine there is not hardly a congregation...

...of any faith tradition or denomination...

...that doesn't find themselves CHANGED...

...by the disruptions of the pandemic.

Paul tells us to complete the work according to our means.

Our “means” at Faith in Lebanon are just different...

...than they were 15 months ago....

...when we set up our disaster hospitality site.

We've had active and faithful members....

...who have relocated in the past year...

...and it has changed who we are now...

...financially, and people-power wise....

...in our serving outside our walls...

...and inside our walls.

But God is always doing new things...

...and we have new people...

...who are gathering with us again...

...who have gone through their own changes...

...in the year of the pandemic....

...and others I trust God has in mind...

...to join us in our ministry together.

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God provides.

It makes no sense to me...

...why I feel such a confidence and even “eagerness” ....

...in the midst of the change and transition...

... we are experiencing...

...as a congregation these days....

...to not only ask God: “What do you want us to do?”

...but to also be excited and eager to follow...

...where God might be calling us.

It makes no sense to me...

...and sometimes that is the best place...

...to look for God’s presence...

...and the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

Paul reminds us:

*<sup>12</sup>For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have.*

Look around.

Examine your circumstances.

## What do you HAVE?

On Tuesday I conducted a virtual tour...

...of our facility...

...for a meeting between...

... our county's Long Term Recovery Committee...

...and a group of Mennonites who are known...

...in the nation-wide Long Term Recovery community...

... for rebuilding houses...

...after floods, tornadoes, and fires.

The Mennonites are prepared....

...to basically set up shop in our community....

...starting end of October...

...and staying through the winter months...

...to bring 30-40 volunteers every week....

...to rebuild houses.

They were touring our facility...

...and another in Nashville...

...to see if we could match the needs...

...their volunteer work groups have.

What we **do not have**....

...at Faith Lutheran Church....

...are electric and sewer hookups for RV's....

...(they shared that typically two or three RV's...

... stay on sight during the work)

...and we don't have an abundance of class rooms...

*(They are used to taking over 2 or 3 rooms...*

*...as "bedrooms" for their long-term stays)....*

*...because those 2 or 3 couples serve as the managers...  
...of the camp and the work planning.*

But because this letter to the Corinthians...  
...was so in my head during our conversation....  
...I was thinking of what we DO have.

I told them our congregation was committed...  
...to disaster volunteer hospitality....  
...and that we would consider anything they needed...  
...to make this work...  
...as long as it was practical for us.

We couldn't build an add-on to our existing building...  
...but we could certainly sacrifice some of our used space...  
...for a few months....  
...for the sake of families....  
... who have lived in partially damaged homes...  
...or been without homes for months...  
...and will be doing so for months to come...  
...until the disaster recovery is complete.

*<sup>9</sup>For [we] know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for [our] sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty [we] might become rich.*

God's math is different than our own.

In our math...  
...we start with a number....  
...and we can subtract any number...  
... less than that original number...  
...and still have some left over.

But God created a world of abundance...  
 ...that God trusted humans to steward...  
 ...so that ALL would have what they need.

It is the example of today's Gospel reading...  
 ...that most often gets lost in the miracles...  
 ...that Jesus healed a woman...  
 ...with menstrual bleeding for 12 years...  
 ...*(who broke all sorts of rules to touch him)*.

And the miracle of the raising to life from death...  
 ...a 12 year old girl...  
 ...*(whose father broke all sorts of social-cultural norms...  
 ...to invite Jesus to his home to heal)*.

The real miracle may be...  
 ...that the crowds thought Jesus was wasting his time...  
 ...heading on to Jarius's house...  
 ...because his daughter was already dead.

It was too late.

But our God is a God of abundance.

Augusburg Fortress worship resource, Sundays and Seasons...  
 ...reminds us:

*"In Mark's gospel, Jesus' power is enough to provide new life for both the rich man's daughter and the poor woman. How often do we assume that God's power is not enough to bring life out of the seemingly impossible choices we make? We are challenged to open up the interruptions and hard choices of our lives to Jesus' power to bring life out of death."*

Into any call to serve...  
...we bring what we have.

That's all we need.

And God takes that and stirs it around...  
...with all the gifts of all the others....  
...and it is ALWAYS enough...  
...and ALWAYS what is needed.....  
...to do the work God calls us to...  
...in THIS place...  
...in YOUR life...  
...and all the places God might lead us.