

“Practicing Pentecost: After Too Much and Too Little”

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2 Corinthians 8:7-15 (Exodus 16:18)

Before we move to the table, I want to draw our attention to a line in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians that we read a moment ago. In the letter, he encourages them to make good on their promise to help the needy in Jerusalem. Specifically, Paul wants them to send the money they had, in fact, collected earlier in the year. In verses (1-6) just before ours, with a gentle poke in the ribs, Paul says that the churches in the Macedonia region, who supposedly had less money to give than the Corinthians, had already completed their pledges. So Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Just finish the job and send the check.” And then he writes: “Your surplus can fill their deficit, so that in the future their surplus can fill your deficit. In this way there is equality (everybody eventually gets to help somebody). As it is written, “The one who gathered more didn’t have too much, and the one who gathered less didn’t have too little.”

Now, the “As it is written” is a reference to an ancient story from *The Book of Exodus* about how God fed our Jewish ancestors in the desert; “manna,” they called it. And what was strange (and thought to be miraculous) wasn’t just the fact that they could eat this dew-like substance that fell from the sky, but that it came in balanced amounts, enough for all if properly shared, and just enough manna was found for just one day, so nothing was to be stored. Our spiritual ancestors believed that fair distribution and just appropriation, the balancing of surpluses or deficits, blessings or burdens are all done under the watchful eye of God. Why? So that there will come a time *after*, a blessed after having too much and a time after having too little. And all will be well, and all will be well, and “all matter of thing will be well.”

One thing I’ve discovered in the last four years, is that the people of First Church need very little reminding that they ought to make good on their promises. No chiding is required around here, no comparing us to other churches, not even do we need regular reminders that we, though rich in many ways, must work at seeing things from a perspective of having little, as Jesus not only taught but demonstrated. Year in and year out, we make good on our promises. We practice Pentecost around here, and we work toward getting beyond the categories too much and too little. Can we do more? Could we work harder? Of course. And we will, because opportunities to practice Pentecost keep coming to us, and we can stand strong when the Wind, the Breath of God blows in our midst. In our town? In two weeks, Doc Robinson will be sharing with us in worship how we can help our own Serenity House get through a rough patch, after nearly two years of debt reductions and reorganization. It is indispensable work in which our entire county is finding renewed pride.

Even though we didn’t read the gospel story assigned to this Sunday, I carried it around with me all week. Part of the reading features a woman in a crowd of people, one solitary figure whom Jesus notices and even senses her touch against his garment. It reminded me of G.K. Chesterton’s lovely assessment of St. Francis: “He (St. Francis) could not see the forest for the trees; he didn’t want to.” Well, we are reminded today that St. Paul was able to see those in need in Jerusalem among a forest of needy people throughout the Roman Empire. Why? Because he wanted to see them.