

“The Lord Rejoices in Generosity”

**Rev. Dr. David Holyan
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**

**Sunday, May 15, 2016
Pentecost Sunday**

Readings from Scripture: John 14:8-17, 25-27 and Psalm 104:24-34

Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and God will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

John 14:8-17,25-27

Before I begin my sermon today, I first of all want to tell you how awesome it is to be back in this pulpit. (applause) I’ve looked forward to standing here for the last four weeks every day of my recovery from back surgery, and especially on this day when we get to celebrate not only the gifts of the spirit but so much more. I’d also like to offer a few thank yous and acknowledgments.

First the thank yous: I’d like to thank Julie Berger, Paul Reiter, Tom Glenn and Karen Blanchard for leading worship so beautifully these last four weeks. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I also want to thank Karen again, along with Bill, Rob, Paula, Dee, Fran, Jane and McKenzie, your wonderful church staff, for keeping the church humming along and not letting me know about too much of anything. Again, thank you. Also to all of you who brought food to our home in the weeks after I left the hospital, a huge thank you. From bran muffins on day one, turkey tetrazzini, chicken dishes, casseroles, vegetarian soup, amazing ribs, Gouda cheese and even a very special rocking chair. Thank you. And thank you to everyone who sent cards of encouragement and flowers, but most especially thank you for your prayers which continue to sustain me and Jani as I continue to walk slowly down the road toward full recovery. I truly have felt overwhelmed by your generosity, your care and your love. And I want to say “thank you” to each of you from the bottom of my heart.

I also would like to acknowledge some folks this day, the day when we celebrate not only Pentecost, but the burning of two mortgages. I'd like to invite all the members of the original building committee and any subcommittee of the building project to please stand and be recognized at this time. (applause) I am mindful that there are those, also, who cannot be with us because they have passed on. If you were part of one of the three building capital campaign committees, not just the leaders but again any part of all the subcommittees--the thank you committee, the welcome committee, the large gift committee, any committee that was ever a part of anything, I invite you to please stand and be recognized at this time. (applause)

I'd like to invite the members of the pipe organ committee to please stand and be recognized at this time. (applause) And I'd also like to recognize a very special guest who is with us today, Mr. Simon Couture of Casavant Frères, who helped the organ committee bring such a beautiful instrument to Kirkwood. Simon would you please stand so that we might say thank you to you as well. (applause)

But mostly today, on this Pentecost Sunday, when we get to burn the mortgages and celebrate becoming **debt-free**, I want to recognize you, the congregation including the saints who have gone on before us, for your overwhelming generosity. Without the giving of your time, your talents and your treasures and your prayers, we would not be here today celebrating like we are. I wish there were time for me to come down from the pulpit, shake hands with each of you individually, look you in the eye and say, "Thank you." But my doctor warned me I should not be preaching for more than an hour, so we won't do that. The only way we are able to be here today is because everyone did what they could to make it happen. We all participated to the best of our abilities. Some gave a lot, some were unable to give anything, some offered prayer, some offered artistic ideas. What matters is that we each offered what we could. And so together we arrive at this day to celebrate. And I trust that the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all of life is pleased with our efforts.

Our second reading today comes from Psalm 104, beginning at the 24th verse.

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works--who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

Psalm 104:24-34

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words that each of us carry within, the words that we have offered in song and in prayer, the words that we've heard read from holy scripture and the words that you have laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless and transform all these into the living word of Jesus Christ, and may that word go forth and do its work among us, within us and through us out into a hurting and broken world. We ask this in Christ's faithful name. Amen.

The traditional passage for Pentecost comes from Acts, Chapter 2.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place and suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

These tongues of fire that Paul talks about in Acts brought together people of different races, different faiths, different ideas, different cultures and began to form them into a community of understanding, a community that could talk to each other and understand each other. A community that began to understand that being brought together in the Spirit of Christ was more important than all the things that had previously divided them. And yet Paul reminds us in Galatians that the fruits of the Spirit are more than simply understanding each other. When the tongues of fire rest upon the heads of the faithful, they are also filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. These are the traits that make up a community of faith that trusts in the goodness of God at work in their lives through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Today while we celebrate all these traits of a faithful community, I want to focus specifically on generosity, on the willingness of the faithful to give what we have for the common good and for the benefit of others. I want to share just a few stories about what our generous congregation looks like. There are so many great stories, especially as I look out and see so many of you here--really too many to tell for one sermon. So I have selected just a couple examples that came to my mind and if I don't tell your story today, please know that it is not because I do not hold it dear. My intention is not to offend anyone whose story I should have told, but simply to give some examples that stuck out to me.

The first story that came to my mind was when I went to visit a couple and was invited into their kitchen. I was offered some iced tea. I sat and I gave them the pitch about giving some money to the organ project. I didn't know anything about what they had done previously. I just went and did what I did which was go and ask and then shut up. After I told the story and shut up, the gentleman informed me that he and his wife had given \$80,000 to the building project. I was unaware of this and I thought to myself, "oops, they're not going to give anything else. That's a lot of money." But as I sat there, very graciously and sly grin on his face, he looked at me and said, "You know what? If we gave 20 more that'd make a nice even 100. Put me down for 20." And I did.

After that, not too long, Jane came into my office one day with a pledge card and she said, "You won't believe this." I didn't know what to expect when she came in, but she handed the pledge card to me and on the pledge card was written, "I wish I could give more" and it was a pledge of \$5 per week. And then on the back of the card it said, "Again, I wish I could give more, but I promise that I will pray for you and for these projects and for the success of this church every day until these debts are paid."

And then there was a Tuesday morning when the Spirit spoke to me in the shower, and I called up a man named Al Moore. When I called him, his first question was, "Am I in trouble?" and I said "No", but thought to myself, "I might be". I had done the math and actually had been challenged the week before. Someone came to me and said, "David, if you get us within \$100,000 of paying off the building, I'll give you the last hundred." And I thought to myself, "well that's great, but how on earth am I going to be able to get all that extra money to get us to that last hundred." And so I decided to go and visit Mr. Moore and sit in his office and explain to him that if he gave a million dollars to the church, that we would be able to pay off both the building project and the organ project. Being an ex-salesperson, I knew that once I made the ask, my job was once again to shut up. Mr.

Moore sat there for less than a minute, rubbed his chin, looked over at me and said quite simply, “You know, I can do that.” And we’re grateful for his generosity and have named the courtyard in his honor.

These stories are just snippets and like I said, there are so many more. People who have given millions, hundreds of thousands, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of dollars and simply prayers. All of these stories have gotten us to this day. All of your acts of kindness have gotten us to the day where we can stand together and rejoice and sing and worship because we are now debt free.

But I want to tell you one more story that happened this week. As we are preparing to celebrate that we are out of debt, someone sends an email to Jane Meppiel and me and says, “Hey, I hear that there is a new boiler down in the basement of the sanctuary that costs \$60,000 and that you are not really sure where the money is going to come from.” Jane’s response was, “Yes. That’s true.” And this person’s response was, “Well, I’ll give \$30,000 as a challenge grant, so hopefully somebody else will match it and we can pay for the boiler.” As we go to celebrate being debt free, the generosity of this congregation continues because people with resources recognize that the church has needs and they are willing to respond in generosity.

When we started these projects, both the building and the organ project, there were some of us who were worried that these projects were too big and too expensive. Some of us thought these projects were just too ambitious and that we’d never be able to pay them off. And some in the congregation, like me, wondered “will these capital campaigns ever end?” So time and again throughout this journey we have had to come back to the words of Christ that Karen read from the Gospel of John. *Peace I leave you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not let them be afraid.* This is always the central message of our Lord. To be a people at peace and unafraid. To be a people whose hearts are never troubled and who are not afraid of stepping out in faith and taking on projects that in the beginning seem just a bit crazy to the outside world and even to some of us. And yet today, this Pentecost Sunday, we recognize and celebrate how we as the body of Christ at First Kirkwood have allowed that peace of Christ to guide our hearts over the past decade and to bring these projects to full completion. Today we join with the psalmist’s prayer, *May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works.* Today we believe that the Lord does rejoice in the works that we all have done together, the people of God participating with the Spirit of God.

Twelve years ago attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the people of this congregation committed themselves to rebuild the education wing, Fellowship Hall, the Memorial Courtyard, the cloisters and to create the new Tree of Life Chapel. In August of 2007, the remodel was complete and we dedicated the new spaces to the glory of God. In 2013, again, attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, this congregation decided to install a Casavant Pipe Organ and remodel the sanctuary in order to enhance the beauty and experience of the worship of God in this our sacred space. Since 2005, members and friends of this congregation have contributed over \$12 million for our beautiful new facilities, our new pipe organ and the renovation of our sanctuary. Three capital campaigns, one organ campaign and 12 years later, we celebrate this day that our commitments have been fulfilled. Today we celebrate and rejoice in the faithfulness of so many, both those present and those who have gone before us, whose generous giving has allowed us to arrive here. Today we recognize the commitment that we have made together as a congregation to vibrantly embrace the call of God to be faithful in living out the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ here in the heart of Kirkwood. Today we give thanks to God. We give thanks for all who contributed money, time, resources and wisdom in leading these special projects. We give thanks for all the ways that the Holy Spirit continues to lead this congregation. And we give thanks for the faithful witness that these facilities and this instrument proclaim to all who enter here now and for all who will enter in the generations to come. And so let us now, trusting in the loving faithfulness of God bring forth and burn the mortgages. Amen.