

Sermon October 5th, 2025

Hope!

In the last decade or so,

it has been hard to deny...

the challenges the church is facing.

We look around on Sunday morning...

and see...

that we have a lot more arm and leg room...

then we used to,

sitting in our pew/chair.

As well,

we think to ourselves...

as we look around the room,

“is it just me,

or do we look a little older these days.

What happened to the days...

where we heard cries, screams,

and kids playing in this worship space.”

The budgets we see...

in the annual reports lately...

come with smaller numbers...

and larger deficits.

We open up the Synod Weekly Newsletter...

and see...

that more and more churches are vacant...

without pastoral leadership.

And it didn't help...

that over the past decade...

the leadership at the synodical level...

across the country...

published despairing stats...

about the future of the church...

if things keep trending in this direction.

I don't know about you,

but I think,

it is getting way too easy for us...

to focus in...

on all the challenges we are facing...

being the church in the 21st century.

Where is the hope?

Where is the gospel?

The good news?

As we reflect on the readings this morning,

we can see...

that we are not alone...

in this tendency...

to focus more so...

on the challenges we face...

when things get tough.

In our first reading this morning...

from the prophet Habakkuk,

the people are suffering in exile.

They have lost so much.

Their homes,

their land,

their freedom.

Even their family and friends.

They too are finding it way too easy...

to focus in on...

the challenges of being God's chosen people.

In our second reading this morning...

from second Timothy,

we see that the church...

is being heavily persecuted.

In fact,

the writer has stated...

that they are writing this letter...

from within the walls...

of a prison cell.

The early believers too...

are finding it way too easy...

to focus in on...

the challenges of being the church.

In Luke's gospel reading,

Jesus has just instructed the disciples...

on how to live...

as a healthy community...

forgiving one another...

even when forgiveness is hard to do.

And this invitation to forgive others...

in very difficult situations to forgive...

has led the disciples...

to ask for more faith.

They too are finding it way too easy...

to focus in on...

the challenges of being disciples.

Our struggle to hear the good news,

to hope in the midst of suffering,

isn't a 21st century problem.

It is a human problem.

We are hard-wired...

to focus in on...

what is threatening to us.

So, to avoid the threatening situation.

Therefore, surviving to live another day.

It is way too easy for us...

when we are facing a challenging situation...

to focus in on...

the losses,

the negative impacts,

the suffering.

In response to our human condition,

God sends someone into our lives,

into our community,

to shake things up.

To redirect our attention...

from the challenges we are facing...

to the hope...

that with God...

anything is possible.

That with God,

healing and redemption from our suffering...

is not just a dream,

but a reality...

that will come to fruition.

That God will breathe new life...

into our broken communities,

our broken world.

In our first reading,

the prophet is sent...

as a voice...

to give people hope...

that God is a God...

who restores us from exile.

Who will give us the tools we need...

to endure...

until this great day of restoration happens.

In our second reading,

the writer from his prison cell...

shares the joy of the gospel.

Yes, we are being persecuted...

but look at the good...

we are doing in our communities.

The blind can see.

The lame can walk.

The prisoners are set free.

The hospitality and love we live out...

are transforming our communities...

in exciting new ways.

In our gospel,

Jesus says,

if we have faith as small as a mustard seed,
a very tiny seed,
then we can uproot mulberry trees.

Or in Matthew's version,
we can move mountains.

Meaning,

the challenges we face...
can seem overwhelming,
but if even for a moment...
we can see the good news,
the good happening in our communities,
then we start to hope.

And when we hope...
then we can see...

that anything is possible with God.

I don't know about you,

but I feel...

that we as the church...

need to focus a little more so...

on the good news.

So, we are getting older.

So, we don't have as many financial resources...

as we once did...

or the current way we are collecting funds...

isn't working for us...

like it once did.

So, we can stretch out more in the pews.

As long as we don't fall asleep during the sermon.

So, the seminaries are not sending out pastors...

in big numbers anymore.

So, some churches have come...

to the end of their life cycle.

These are challenges.

I am not denying them.

Unfortunately, though,

these very challenges...

I listed above...

are getting way too much...

of our attention these days.

Instead,

can we focus more so...

on the good we are seeing...

in the church today.

Like the ministry you lived out at St. Ansgar...

over this past summer,

having a Vacation Bible School for seniors.

What a creative and wonderful idea.

How many people in this age demographic,

living in our communities,

experience loneliness,

and have a need for connection with others.

It's not just youth who like to get together,

and have some fun.

Or the more recent focus on social justice issues...

at Redeemer.

Shaping our ministries in new ways.

Bringing to light issues...

like climate change,

truth and reconciliation,

and pride...

in our worship services.

Walking in the Pride Parade...

for the past three years...

or helping serve the community breakfast...

over at St. Andrew's Memorial Anglican church...

or wearing an orange shirt...

on Sunday morning...

to stand in solidarity...

with the Indigenous people of this land.

Being present with those in our community...

who have been mistreated.

Showing them...

that they are loved and valued.

Showing our community...

that we may be small,

but we are mighty.

I'm sure if you had a moment to think about it,

you could think of other examples...

that your church community is doing...

to make a positive impact in your community.

I don't know about you,

but I am tired of hearing...

that the church is dying.

It's not.

This is God's church.

And so, the church is very much alive.

Continuing to make a difference...

in the communities we serve in.

I'll say it again.

The church is very much alive.

The prophets said it.

Jesus said it.

The early church leaders said it.

We as leaders today...

need to say it.

May we find hope in the good news...

that Jesus came into our world...

to breathe new life into it.

That through his death and resurrection...

we see...

that with God anything is possible.

That through his gift of the Holy Spirit...

we are empowered to be the church...

in all circumstances,

including the ones we find ourselves...

living in today. **Amen.**

Sermon October 12th, 2025

Thanksgiving Inspires Generous Hearts!

Imagine this scene:

The alarm on your phone goes off.

Or if you are a little more old-school kind of person,

the alarm clock on your side table goes off.

You open your eyes for a moment.

But for some reason...

you feel extra tired today.

So, you hit the snooze.

A few times,

until your spouse enters the room...

in a panic,

and says

“you need to get up.

You'll be late for..."

I'll let you make up...

whatever activity...

you think you need...

to get ready for.

You don't have time to shower.

You feel a little off,

because you have been woken up abruptly.

You are a little grumpy, sensitive, groggy.

Normally your spouse's annoying habits...

don't bother you so much,

but today these habits are bothering you so much...

that you have to say something.

The children's noisiness...

is usually just background noise to you.

But today it sounds like...

living next to a freeway.

So, you yell at them to be quiet.

You get in the car.

You feel guilty...

for the way you acted...

but you are not in the head space...

to be reflective at this time.

On the way to wherever you are going...

you hit some road construction.

Surprise. Surprise.

The road construction is something...

you have become accustomed to...

living in this city.

But today, it is intolerable.

You scream at the top of your lungs...

about how much you hate this city.

As the day goes on...

you seem to focus more so...

on everything that goes wrong...

and could go wrong.

You are in a real negative head space.

When you get home after...

whatever you were doing,

you update your budget...

and start to feel anxious...

about not having enough.

Then you remembered...

that you need to get something...

for the food drive at church.

You reach into the back of the cupboard...

and take out an old can of pie filling...

that's been in there for a millennium.

As you are getting ready for bed,

the song "bad day" by Daniel Powter...

comes on the radio.

You are totally relating to this song right now.

We all have had a day like this.

Where we get up...

on the wrong side of the bed.

Sometimes, we can have a lot of days like this.

Our brains are hard wired...

in a way...

to help protect us from harm.

So, it doesn't take much for us...

to focus on what threatens us,

what is potentially going to hurt us,

all the negative stuff going on...

in our lives and in the world.

So that we can react to avoid these situations.

Thus, keeping ourselves alive.

In Paul's letter to the church in Philippi,

he sees a church...

that is suffering from a lot of persecution,

which is leading the people...

to focus too much so...

on all the bad stuff...

that is happening to them...

as a result of being a follower of Christ.

I wouldn't be surprised...

if a lot of people...

are in a negative head space.

Wondering if it is worth it...

to keep being part of the church.

We can relate.

The church is in a vulnerable place today.

Declining membership.

Declining financial resources.

Aging congregations.

Churches closing their doors.

Feeling less and less relevant in our communities.

It can be easy to focus on the negatives,

and to wonder if it is worth it...

to keep being part of the church.

Well, in Paul's letter to the church in Phillipi,

Paul is inviting us...

to have thankful hearts.

To focus more so...

on the good things happening...

in our community.

The acts of healing, hospitality, love, grace,

and generosity...

that we are witnessing...

and living out as the church.

This doesn't mean...

completely ignoring the bad feelings...

that come our way.

Of course, we need to name them,

and deal with them.

But Paul is challenging us...

not to focus so much so...

on these negative thoughts and feelings.

Because when we do...

our whole perception of life is impacted...

by these thoughts and feelings,

and this can make it more difficult for us...

to be generous,

to be hospitable,

to be gracious,

to be a healing presence in people's lives.

According to Paul,

when we focus more so...

on the good things...

that are happening...

when being the church in the world.

Then we are more likely...

to continue being...

the church in the world.

Jesus agrees.

In the gospel...

Jesus invites us...

to focus on the good,

he is doing in the world...

as much so...

as we focus on getting bread to eat.

And so, as Paul says,

give thanks for these good things we witness.

Because when we have thankful hearts,

then we are more able to listen...

to God's invitation in Deuteronomy...

where God asks us...

to give of the first fruits of our labour.

This means not the pie filling...

at the back of the cupboard.

But the best food in our house.

The twelve-dollar spaghetti sauce,
and the fanciest pasta.

When we focus on the gifts God has given us.

Then generosity isn't so hard...
for us to practice.

Because we are not so worried...
about having too little.

Or about losing what we have.

Instead, we are thankful of what we do have,
and this helps us believe...

more deeply in a God...

who provides for our well being.

Allowing us to depend less so...
on material possessions,

and more so...

on the Bread of Life.

Jesus.

Looking back at our scene...

at the beginning of this sermon...

imagine this:

We are thankful...

that our spouse was there...

to wake us up...

so that we could get...

to wherever we are going...

on time.

We are thankful...

that we have children...

who keep us young...

with their cheerful noise.

We give thanks for the driver...

who let us into the lane...

when we needed to change lanes,

and for those working on the roads...

to keep them safe...

and keep our cars...

from needing an annual alignment.

We notice the little subtleties...

throughout the day...

of good gestures...

by people...

from a friendly smile...

to an offer of help.

We give thanks...

that even though things look...

a little tight financially right now...

we manage to be paying all our bills on time.

With this thankful heart,

we dart out to the store...

and get some high-quality food products...

for the food drive.

As we get ready for bed,

after listening to “bad day”

we hear the song

“We’re here for a good time (not a long time)”

by Trooper.

We fall asleep with a thankful heart.

Today we find ourselves...

in another thanksgiving weekend...

where we will eat and drink...

with family and friends,

and maybe even a few strangers.

Where we will give thanks...

for all that God has done in our lives.

Where we are moved...

by this weekend of thankfulness...

to be more empathetic...

to those in need...

and offer to live out the generosity...

God invites us to live out.

To give of our first fruits...

so others may see the goodness of God...

and live their lives with thankful hearts.

Giving of their first fruits to others.

Because God is a generous God,

who gives us life.

Who invites us into a way of life...

where we experience the goodness of God...

every day.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Sermon October 19th, 2025

Generosity!!!

There is a common theme...

we hear...

in the bible stories...

we reflect on this morning:

When we practice generosity...

we fulfill the needs of one another.

In our first reading,

Elijah's resources have run out...

as he tries to survive...

during a great famine...

that has hit the land.

God sends Elijah...

to this widow and her son...

for help.

At first, this seems like a cruel joke.

The widow and her son...

have just enough food...

for one final meal...

before they breathe their last.

How can they help Elijah...

through this famine?

They can't even help themselves.

But sometimes God works in mysterious ways.

So, Elijah pleads with the widow,

and to the shock of the audience,

the widow listens to Elijah...

and offers to feed him.

In response to the widow's generosity,

God grants Elijah...

the power...

to make what little food they have left...

last for the duration of the famine.

Keeping himself,

the widow,

and her son alive.

Through the generosity of the widow,

God's generosity shines bright.

In the gospel,

Simon Peter, James, and John...

have been out on the sea...

all night...

trying to get a catch,

and yet, nothing.

How are they going to feed their families...

if they cannot catch any fish?

In the midst of this stressful time for the three,

a stranger by the name of Jesus...

comes to them...

and asks to use their boat.

He needs a place to preach his message.

A pulpit.

One would think...

Simon Peter, James, and John...

want to get back out there...

to try again.

Instead,

they lend the boat to Jesus.

They show generosity to Jesus.

In response to their generosity,

after Jesus is done his sermon,

he invites them to push the boat out...

and drop the nets again.

And even though Simon Peter...

expresses some doubts...

to whether they will catch any fish.

They do so,

and lo and behold,

the nets are bursting with fish.

Through the generosity of Simon Peter,

James, and John,

God's generosity once again shines brightly.

Jesus then invites them...

to leave this bounty behind...

and follow him.

To live out this generosity...

in their every day lives.

Trusting that Jesus will continue to provide...

for their wellbeing.

And so, they do.

What we see from these two bible stories...

is that when we practice generosity...

everyone's needs are met.

Today we witnessed the baptism...

of Harold aka Harry.

Where God promises us,

that God will walk with us through life.

That God will provide for our wellbeing.

That we will be recipients of God's generosity.

As well, we too, make promises...

through our godparents...

that we will live out this generosity...

in our every day lives.

Today we commemorate World Food Day.

Remembering the many people in need...

in our communities...

across the globe.

Food scarcity,

food distribution issues,

food waste...

are real problems...

that impact millions of people worldwide.

And yet,

many of us...

have more than enough food...

to fill our bellies.

Last weekend we celebrated Thanksgiving...

with family and friends.

Feasting on turkey,

stuffing, mashed potatoes,

corn on the cob, carrots,

Yorkshire pudding,

pumpkin pie.

We witnessed firsthand...

the abundance of food...

many of us have access too.

God has indeed been generous to us...

and hopes...

that we will replicate this generosity to others.

In worship this morning...

we have an opportunity...

to support the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

An organization that helps people...

get access to the food they need.

Other organizations...

like the local Foodbank and Indwell...

also help people get access...

to the food and shelter they need.

When we give to these organizations...

it is one way...

that we can share of the generosity...

God shows us everyday.

It is one way...

we can live out our baptismal call...

to be generous to others.

It is one way...

we can show our thanks to God...

who is a generous God...

who shows us generosity...

all the time...

through people like Elijah,

Jesus,

the widow,

the son,

Simon Peter,

James, John,

You, and me.

God is a generous God...

who has created us,

a generous people.

So that everyone can get access...

to what they need.

Amen.