

Sixteenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): “Grateful for Your Generosity!”

Amos 6:1a, 4-7; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

September 27-28, 2025

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

It's **Gratitude** Weekend at Holy Trinity! It comes after last weekend's parable of the dishonest steward and the deadliness of the sin of **greed**. This weekend we hear another parable about the use/misuse of wealth, about the rich man who doesn't care about or doesn't even **see** the homeless/starving/sick beggar on his doorstep, a man named Lazarus (a fictional character, **not** Martha & Mary's brother whom Jesus raised from the dead). The anonymous rich man in the story ends up in hell, not because he's **materially wealthy** but because he's **spiritually bankrupt**, without compassion toward his neighbor in need. We're reminded, once again, that the way we manage material blessings, including money, has eternal consequences. By the way, it's said that this parable about the rich man and Lazarus changed the course of Albert Schweitzer's life. He associated Lazarus with the African people languishing on Europe's doorstep. He left his former life, went to Africa, and founded the Lambarene Hospital.

In the midst of this week's and last week's dire messages about the fallout of greed, **we're** celebrating greed's opposite: generosity!

We have a lot to celebrate because our faith family recognizes that:

- **All we have is from God**, true of us as individuals, as families, as a congregation.
- In God's plan, a significant portion of what comes **to** us is meant to pass **through** us to others. We are blessed to **be** a blessing!
- **We are here for those who aren't here yet.** We're tasked with extending to others the welcome we ourselves have received. As open-hearted as God is to us, we should be toward others. The circle of care is drawn large enough to include all who want to be a part of it. If the table seems too small, we add a leaf!
- **We are also here for those who will never be here.** We don't care just for those on our doorstep and whose faces we know and love. We also care for those at a distance, often faceless and nameless to us, but whose needs are known to us. (Many thanks to the Social Ministry and Justice & Peace teams for raising our awareness of local, national and international needs.) We don't prepare food, knit blankets, raise and send money, volunteer at shelters for the unhoused, fill the shelves of food pantries to attract new members. We do so because our Lord Jesus has tipped us off that He dwells in the last, the lost and the least, regardless of zip code, skin color, religious or political affiliation, employment status, gender identity, or police record. Our neighbor, nearby or far away, is **not** God. But as we read in the first letter of John, if we can't love our neighbor whom we **can** see, how can we possibly love God, whom we **can't** see?? (1 John 4:20-21)
- I have a little prayer card with the wonderful saying, **“The only things we'll be left with are what we've given away.”** When I approach the pearly gates I'm hoping to need a moving van and not just a little red wagon, a backpack or a change purse!

Through **your** generosity, Holy Trinity is able to **be** generous in many ways. We can take holy pride in the fact that we're historically included in the top five giving congregations in our NJ

Synod, which comprises the entire state. Our Synod passes along 50% of what we give to our churchwide body, the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, helping to support Lutheran World Hunger, Global Refuge, helping refugees at home and abroad, Lutheran Disaster Response which helped our neighbors and some of our own members after Superstorm Sandy, seminaries like United Seminary in Philly, Peter's alma mater, and Trinity Seminary in Ohio, Ned's alma mater, church camps like Crossroads, new mission starts, reorganizational assistance for rural and urban congregations on the struggle bus, foreign missionaries, etc....

What are examples of our faith family's in-reach, outreach, generosity locally and beyond, that make you feel holy pride to be part of Holy Trinity, whether you're formally "on the books" or not? As you hear examples, know that it is **your** gifts of talent, time and treasure, multiplied and empowered by God's grace, that make all of this possible!

God is not anti-money. God just wants to be sure we're worshiping God and not wealth. How do we know what or who it is we're **really** worshiping? If the desire for money causes us to break any of the commandments, that's a signal that cash not Christ is sitting on the throne of our hearts. Money does a lot of good in this world, so money is not the problem. **Love** of money is. Money fuels our ministries: money to pay program and support staff, who lead ministry and who enable you, the saints, to perform yours.

The more money we receive, the more we can send forth into the world to do good. The more time and talent are invested in our faith family's ministries, the more robust, life-changing, transforming our ministries become. We have so many blessings to share! Our "gifts given" pale in comparison to the awesome Gift of God's Son, our Lord Jesus. But our time, talent and treasure enable us to proclaim God's goodness in the gift of our Savior. There is so much generosity among us for which to be grateful! Thank you — from the heart.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham