

Sermon: The Great Giver of Life
20 Pentecost, Year C
Sirach 35:12-17

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“Give to the Most High as he has given to you, and as generously as you can afford.”

That line comes from our first lesson of today from Sirach. Some of you may be scratching your heads as you may not have heard of Sirach before. Who on earth is he and how did he work his way into our Sunday lectionary?

Sirach is part of the Apocrypha, which is a collection of writings or books that are not officially part of our biblical canon. And yet the Christian tradition acknowledges that these books are still illuminated writings that can offer us something worthwhile to deepen our understanding of how we live out our Christian calling. The full name of the book is “Ecclesiasticus”, or the “Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach.” It is a collection of proverbial material or wisdom literature that generally fell into disuse by Jews because it wasn’t included in their canon of scripture. It was written about 200 years before Christ.

This reading from Sirach points to a profound truth that is echoed throughout scripture – that God is the Source of life, the great Giver. “Give to the most high as he has given you.” The reading calls us to explore the depths of our belovedness, to examine the depths of God’s generosity toward his creation and to prayerfully consider the response we will make.

As we consider how God has given to us over the course of our lives, let’s think about the ways in which God gives to us. Anyone want to offer something you feel has been a gift to you?

Relationships – friendships, family, pets

Job, retirement, school

Nature – glorious displays of God’s creative power. Right now, leaves changing color, beauty

Life itself – our health, our breath

God – Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer – Jesus, who gave his life for us, the Holy Spirit

What about the gifts other people have given to get you where you are today? Think about yourself as a growing baby in your mother’s womb. Your parents, even if they weren’t perfect, with God’s help, gave you life. What about that first nurse that held you and swaddled you, the doctor that delivered you? Maybe the person who paid for you to go to school. Or the teachers who nurtured your intellect, or creativity? What about the lawmaker who passed the law that keeps your air and water safe enough to drink? What about the worker in some distant land who made your favorite pair of jeans? What about the farmer in Costa Rica, that grew and harvested the coffee beans you consumed this morning? You didn’t get here by yourself. You were not self made. There is no such thing as a self made man or woman – thank God!

To take time to consider how we got to be where we are can be a very humbling experience. Because it causes us to realize we are dependent on so many people and natural resources, which all come from God. We are all interconnected. We are all interdependent.

One of the questions that we ask each week in our Tuesday Lectio Divina group as we meditate on a passage of scripture is, “What is God inviting you to do or to be through this scripture?” Today, I ask a similar question of us all. What is God inviting us to do? How will we respond to Sirach’s exhortation that we give to the most high as he has given to us and as generously as we can afford?

Giving and gratitude are intricately woven together. A couple of weeks ago in a sermon, I encouraged you to write out a list of 100 things you were thankful for. I didn’t intend for you to turn those in. But in hearing from several of you that the exercise was helpful in thinking about what it means to live out a grateful life, I have changed my mind and welcome you all to turn them in. And for those of you weren’t here that day, I’m giving you another opportunity to make this list. This list is not meant to be just another exercise. It’s intended to bring us to a deeper awareness of all that God has done and is doing in our life.

On Harvest Day, November 3 at breakfast a few people will share parts of their lists so that we can rejoice together over all that God is doing. Then at the offertory that day, I will invite you to bring your list and place it in a basket we’ll designate for those lists and offer them up to God at the altar.

The lifeblood of this church is in giving of ourselves. Our recently stated mission is **1. To love and serve God with joy and action, 2. To follow Jesus and see him in the faces of our neighbors, and 3. To listen for the Spirit and respond to God’s nudges.**

In order to live into that mission we will need to give money, time, effort, love, energy, thought, discernment, wisdom, an open heart and mind and other gifts from God to accomplish his hopes for us. If we are to live into Sirach’s wisdom of giving as God has given us and as generously as we can afford, we are to think holistically – realizing that others thrive when we give, whether it is putting food into the curbside food pantry, or volunteering at the hospital. And often we thrive, too, when we give. Something about giving allows the lifeblood of God’s creation to flow more freely.

There’s a beautiful prayer in our prayer books I’d like to end with, A General Thanksgiving p.836. What I like so much about it is that it not only points out the obvious things we can be thankful for, but it also includes the less obvious things, like disappointments and failure, that we can also be thankful for because of what they can teach us.

As we ponder giving of ourselves to God by giving to God’s creation, may we give with grateful hearts.

Please turn to p.836 and let’s pray together.

Amen.