

The Gifts of God for the People of God

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Psalm 36:5-10 and 1 Cor. 12:4-11

Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church Grand Rapids MI

Great is Your Faithfulness, is one of my favorite hymns and maybe is yours also. I like to read the back story notes on hymns to see what inspired the author and to learn a bit about their life. So here is what I found on the Hymnary.org website:

Thomas Chisholm, the author of "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and 1200 other poems was born in a log cabin in Kentucky in 1866, and he lived an unremarkable life: he worked as a schoolteacher, a newspaper editor, and insurance agent. Unlike many hymns that have heart-wrenching stories behind them, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is inspired by the simple realization that God is at work in our lives on a daily basis. Chisholm wrote, "My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God, who has given me many wonderful displays of provincial care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness." The hymn reminds us that God doesn't only work in dramatic or miraculous ways, but also in simple, everyday ways. It also reminds us that Jesus has never failed us in the past, so we have no reason to doubt God's faithfulness in the future.

I agree. God's work in my life has not been dramatic or miraculous but it has been visible in simple, everyday ways. Many times, I experience God's faithfulness through others. Just these past few weeks as my family has faced new health challenges and our community has needed to scale back due to the Omicron surge, I have seen the care and compassion of God exhibited in and through others. Many organizations, churches, businesses, and schools have all wrestled with the balance between remaining open or closing to support the whole community. It is never an easy decision. Our Church Council has responded to the strains on our health care system and decided to go virtual for the time being until this surge subsides. Many church members have personally expressed their support of this decision even though we all wish we could be together in church building. Instead, we are gathering virtually to protect one another. We are showing the love of God through this.

We know living in this world, where death, danger and illness are part of life, we may question God's faithfulness when these hardships happen. There is a misconception though, that by being a Christian we will be delivered from the hardships of life. In fact, Christ says the opposite in John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." To experience the troubles of life is not a sign of sin or unfaithfulness, but simply that we are still in this world and human.

Our peace comes through the faithfulness of God we experience in our everyday life. It also comes through the gifts of God given to the people of God as we hear in our second scripture from 1 Corinthians 12. God, through the Holy Spirit, has blessed us with many gifts that are designed to promote God's grace and love in the world.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of God we are called to be Christ in the world. St. Teresa of Avila once wrote:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which Jesus walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which God blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are Christ's body.

Yes, we are the body of Christ called to extend the faithfulness of God in a hurting world. But these past two years has been difficult, due to COVID. It's been hard to gather as the Body of Christ in worship and service as we once did. We enjoy the fellowship, the gathering of hearts in prayer, the collective action we offer to support others in our community. But remember church, we are still the Body of Christ even when we cannot gather within these stone walls.

You see we are not a church simply because we have open doors. No, we are the church, Christ's Body in this part of the world, because we are faithfully offering an

open invitation to be Christ in the world with us. We model the faithfulness of God in the world, extending God's grace. We can do this even when we cannot gather here on this beloved site.

The words from 1 Corinthians reminds us of the many gifts God bestows on us. These gifts are used to build up one another in Christ for the common Good. Just like how we are currently not gathering in person, for the common Good. This is how we are loving the church and one another in these trying times.

In closing I want to read a poem based on 1 Corinthians 12 written by my wife. It is called How to Love a Church

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7, NRSV

Poem by Amy G.S.A. Brooks, **Another Scroll**: Defiant Readings for Lectionary C. pages 26-27. The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland OH 2021.

How to Love a Church

Wash your cup after coffee hour.

Greet a guest, join the choir,
teach the children.

Agree to serve on a committee.

Bring your talents, bring your energy,
bring your enthusiasm,
put your money in the plate,
show up for services,
show up.

Show up,
not because the doors are open
but because the invitation is open
to bring your whole self
to the gathering of selves
and dare to be challenged,
informed, inspired,
to be the one who challenges,
informs, inspires,
to be the presence that only you can bring
to the Beloved Community

in the tradition of the Spirit
of Love.

And love.

Do the hard stuff.

Stay in the room with the crying baby,
and with the adult who glares at the crying baby,
and with that person who gets on your last nerve.

Love the whole congregation,
stay in the conversation
even when you disagree,
especially when you disagree.,
Stay because you disagree,

and leave

because love can mean knowing
when to wipe the dust and go
when to say no.

And know within yourself
when you've been wrong,
when being strong feels more like bending,
like picking up the threads and mending,
like finding new instead of ending
and tending things you find surprising.

And find

to your surprise
that all the ways to love a church
are the same as all the ways to love yourself.

Greet a guest and show up,
be ready for the glow up,
you might even need to grow up,
proclaim your no, and sew up,
and wash
your own
damn
cup.