

Message for November 19, 2023 Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church
“Vitality in Community” Rev. Trish Eckert

This is a bit different from our “usual” message/sermon, as we were preparing to have our Annual Meeting and that meeting was held in the midst of worship. These reflections were spoken prior to the business of the Annual Meeting. We’ve also enclosed the Comparative Budget, so that you have the information that everyone in the congregation was given prior to the meeting.

Over the past month, we’ve explored how generosity impacts our relationships to self, God, and other, the ways it can shape our actions, and informs our faith. Now, as we prepare to review the proposed 2024 budget for Tippe, we also consider the ways we are called into ministry, how we support one another in community, and how we share our resources with those in need.

The generosity of Tippe and our partners in ministry is evident in the many ways we all come together and share our gifts and skills, our finances, and our time and energy. While reflecting on generosity, let us be mindful of the ways that Tippe responds to the call of our missions. Divine Intervention, Tippe gardens, and our Arts and Science Literacy Program minister to those seeking sustenance, shelter, care, and connection. These ministries are vibrant and vital. They illustrate the ways we show up in the world and we ourselves are transformed in the process.

The Presbytery describes seven different ways of showing up that are considered “marks of a vital congregation.” As we enter worship and our annual meeting, I invite us to think deeply about the ways Tippe engages in these marks:

1. *Lifelong Discipleship* – faith community engages in spiritual practices together At Tippe that might look like our Monday night Zoom gatherings for Sanctuary Time of Belonging, or on Sunday nights, Centering Prayer. We also engage in Adult Education and have experienced the labyrinth walk here on our grounds together.
2. *Intentional Authentic Evangelism* – faith community sharing the Good News with others through conversation and action. At Tippe that might look like an invitation to worship or serving alongside us in one of our ministries” Divine Intervention, the gardens, ASLC). During the Presbytery Gathering yesterday, Tippe was highlighted as a community that illustrates “intentional authentic evangelism.”
3. *Outward Incarnational Focus* – faith community engaged in mission, advocacy, or justice. Tippe has also been recognized as having strong gifts in this area – we engage with the community and partner with others to serve those who are experiencing food insecurity or are without a home.
4. *Empowered Servant Leadership* – is illustrated by a faith community that is engaged in sharing their gifts and abilities with the community – folks working together to lead the community in worship and ministry. At Tippe, that looks like our Tippe band, as well as those who participate on our Session, the people who create our worship space (hanging of the greens, next week - for example, and

developing the liturgical arts/expression in our sanctuary, the folks who set up zoom and manage our tech, welcoming visitors, and Tippe Café. Our own community members provide pulpit supply and lead some of our Adult Education classes! And many folks fill leadership roles in our ministries, such as: Hungry Hearts, The Tippe Gardens, and Divine Intervention warming room.

5. *Spirit-Inspired Worship* – A faith Community engaging the message after worship through discussion and Adult Ed. At Tippe, we acknowledge God’s presence in our time together and share stories of how God equips us to show up in the world. “Spirit-inspired worship” also takes place in our missions – countless times, our volunteers have said that Church for them, Worship for them is serving Divine Intervention or Hungry Hearts or the Gardens or Arts and Literacy Camp.
6. *Caring Relationships* – essentially, this is expressing love for one another. It is the care we provide to each another and to the stranger. At Tippe, that includes our fellowship time after worship, our reaching out to one another when we haven’t seen each other in a while - the cards we send and the phone calls and visits we make when someone is sick or coming to the end of their earthly life. We all witnessed the ways that Janet and Gary included the entire Tippe community as they faithfully visited Tom throughout the years of his illness. Tom never set foot in Tippe again after his stroke, but he always knew that Tippe missed him and loved him.
7. *Ecclesial Health* – (fancy word for church) is exhibited most readily through a sustainable budget and healthy conflict resolution in the congregation. At Tippe, we continue to function transparently regarding our finances and our budgetary needs, we commit to clear communication, providing one another support, and carrying the work of the church forward together (rather than handing it off to a small group or the lone pastor.) These actions indicate ecclesial health.

Today’s texts speak to abundance, faithfulness, and our relationship with the Divine. We are reminded of the countless things for which we can be grateful. It can be difficult to maintain a state of gratitude. We get tired, distracted, discouraged, frightened – there is so much pain in the world. And yet gratitude is a powerful way to lift us up out of ourselves and gives us the perspective and energy to care for ourselves, for creation, and for one another. Let us continue to support each another in noticing the glimmers of joy, the opportunity for connection, and the invitation to show up and share what we have when we can and in turn, receive when we ourselves are hungry or angry, lonely, or tired.

A Meditation – Last week I came across a wonderful post from the Center for Action and Contemplation, in which they shared a practice of embodied gratitude developed by meditation teacher Kaira Jewel Lingo. She calls this, “Nurturing the Good.”

I want to take a moment, before we enter our time that is set aside for our Congregational Meeting, to nurture the good in ourselves. We as a community gather together here in this sanctuary most Sunday mornings. Our worship practices include

prayer, singing, contemplating, sharing, discussing, and delving into silence. We express praise and lament, as well as our struggles and joys. In the midst of it all, we ask good questions.

So, this being an embodied practice, I want you to begin by settling into your body. Feel your breath, notice the environment, be aware of sounds, and connect with sensations in your body. Open to what's here in your body and mind, with acceptance and kindness....

Now I invite you to appreciate yourself for your practice and the many ways that you are open to learn and grow. Something in you is energetic and motivated to grow and deepen; it cares about your own inner life, your own happiness. Feel the goodness of this impulse in you that brought you to practice in the first place. A kind of faith in yourself and your own inherent goodness. Feel it in your body. Notice its qualities and characteristics, this strength of mind/heart. Open to it, let it grow in you....

Let yourself bring to mind other things you feel grateful for. How your body is still functioning right now, your heart still beating, your lungs expanding and retracting, your skin protecting your flesh.

Let yourself connect with gratitude for the presence of beloved people or pets in your life, or someone who has been supportive of you in the past. Connect with the ways they were present for you and how they made a difference in your life....

Now let yourself open to gratitude for the world around you, the Earth that is supporting you right now, the sun that shows up each day, the air that sustains all life, water, the stars, the oceans. Feel the gift of life that is pulsing through your veins now and let yourself feel thankful for it. Feel the gift of life that surrounds you every moment, everywhere you go.

Feel this gratitude in your body. Let yourself be nurtured, strengthened by it.

And notice if there are any ideas arising about how you might create a beautiful past today or soon, for yourself and those you care about.