

Message October 22, 2023 Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church
“Joyful Generosity: Receive Gratefully” Rev. Trish Eckert

This morning’s Bible Wisdom teachings convey to us the power of receiving. Before Moses comes to the end of his very long life, God reveals to him the Promised Land and then appoints Joshua to guide the next generation. God makes sure the people are not left leaderless.

In light of what is happening currently in modern day Israel and Palestine, this text feels especially complex. For the purpose of today’s reflection, let’s turn our attention to the gifts being given and received.

Deuteronomy, translates from the Hebrew “Devarim,” meaning, *words*. This is the fifth book of the Old Testament, written in the form of a farewell address by Moses to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land of Canaan. Throughout the text, we witness a deep and abiding relationship between Moses and God – including Moses being the only human to interact with the Divine face-to-face.

Moses’ death comes after a forty-year journey in the wilderness when they had come to the plains of Moab. Although God promised to go before the Israelites on their sojourn to Canaan, if it were not for Moses’ leadership and intercession on more than one occasion, the people would have been destroyed by God (Exodus 32:10), perished from hunger or thirst (Exodus 16:1-3; 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2-5), or been killed by their enemies (Exodus 17:8; Numbers 20:14-21; 21:21-35). Yet, Moses would not accompany the people as they prepared to enter the land. Instead, the narrator reports that before dying, Moses is only allowed to view the land from the top of Mount Nebo (also Pisgah) overlooking Canaan. Standing east of the Jordan, the text says that God showed Moses “the whole land” (Deuteronomy 34:1)—the north, southwest, and west. The scope of the details is described according to territorial boundaries by tribe, which have yet to be allotted. God reiterates that this is the land that God promised their ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It happens that along the journey, Moses hadn’t followed God’s directions to the letter, and God let Moses know that he would never be allowed to enter the promised land – only to view it. Sometimes we have a desire for a particular gift or outcome, and it doesn’t pan out like we hoped. Ultimately, Moses receives a glimpse of what is to come for his people and is assured that all that he worked toward is finally coming to fruition. This text doesn’t exactly provide us comfort or satisfaction, but it is one aspect of what it is to *receive*.

The New Testament reading provides us “the greatest commandment,” and following the teaching that we love God with all our heart and soul and mind, we are given the second commandment, to *love your neighbor as yourself*. In order to follow this teaching, we are reminded to love ourselves. Yet most of us treat others more gently,

kindly, and fully than we do ourselves. We struggle to accept or to receive. We are programmed to give rather than to “take.” But this can easily cause us to become out of balance. Ultimately, being in the position of “giver” ALWAYS becomes a stance that implies power – I always have the upper hand if I have something to give and am so independent/put together/impermeable that I don’t NEED anything. Often, this becomes a point of pride, whether we are aware of it or not.

Just a few weeks ago, in our “I’ve Been Meaning to Ask” series, the question, “what do you need?” was a powerful query to consider. *What do you need?* The question alone can crack you open, or soften your heart, or at least shift your gaze inward to allow for your own human-ness, your surrender – this obviously is a vulnerable place to reside. It can feel scary, risky – what if I figure out what I need and actually name it and then the need isn’t met or can’t be met or won’t be met? I think these kinds of questions indicate when you’re getting ahead of yourself. It is actually the surrender, the softening, that enables us to receive.

Keep in mind, a gift is not given because you deserve it. It may not even be given because you want it. It is given because the giver wants to express their love and/or appreciation to you. Our challenge is, will we gratefully and graciously receive it?

This week as I sought out readings and resources about receiving, I came across the work of Nick Werber, who works as an integrative coach and supports people who seek healing from trauma. He writes that as empaths, healers, and folks in the helping fields/ those who work in service to others, delve into their own personal work, what creates some of the deepest experiences of personal healing and transformation is for them to practice “receiving their own medicine.” They need to take all those gifts of space-holding, the gifts of tenderness and non-judgment, and all the accumulated wisdom that they’ve gathered up, and turn it more deeply on themselves. He notes that if you’ve earned your place in the world by being an expert giver, this is no small feat. For that matter, sometimes we’ve developed this constant stance of giving because that approach is what kept us safe or even what kept us alive.

He highlighted a favorite Mr. Roger’s quote relevant to this: “It’s so very hard receiving. When you give something, you’re in much greater control, but when you receive something, you’re so vulnerable.”

Reading Nick Werber’s work and thinking about what the wonderful Mr. Roger’s says so beautifully brought to mind for me an experience I had right here in the sanctuary just a few weeks ago – it was during our Adult Education gathering after worship and it happened to be the very week that we were discussing, “what do you need?” We were a small group, and as we settled in, I mentioned having difficulty with my feet and ankles. I’ve been coping with ongoing pain that sometimes impedes my mobility. And the next thing I knew, I was being offered by people in the circle, reiki, and massage, and reflexology. I was gently invited to accept reiki and massage right then during our

discussion, and as we had our conversation about “what we need,” my feet were in the lap of the person sitting next to me.

This experience provided me the opportunity to connect with and express my wholeness as well as my vulnerability. It was an opportunity for me to “take my own medicine.” In the following week I also arranged a reflexology session with the other person in the circle who had offered it. And as a result, when I left for my pastor’s retreat, I was able to hike every day. This was something I thought I might not ever be able to do again – take long walks on a daily basis. This experience enabled me to experience care from people in this community. It has improved my quality of life and I feel better equipped to show up when and where I am needed. It is through receiving that I am filled up and again able to attend to others.

As I explored readings and resources about receiving, I of course came across mountains of images, quotes, and writings about giving – there is no question that we are told over and over again how important and necessary giving is – and of course, we know that giving is important and necessary. However, if that is all that we focus on, we are in danger of drying up – of our lives shriveling to the point that we are just hanging on to the pride of *not needing*, giving to others becomes a power position. Deep down, each of us in our humanity, sits inside the holy invitation to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and to also love the other as we love ourselves. May we seek openings that enable us to soften and to receive, and in turn, to grow in compassion. Amen.