

Year A Proper 25
October 29, 2023
Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Matthew 22:34-46

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Years ago, when I was a new chaplain, we had a patient slip on the ice and suffer several broken bones as a result. Upon arrival to the emergency room, he had been rushed immediately to surgery. Things had gone well, and now he was in stable condition in the ICU. I had taken the patient's three adult children up to his room, and his nurse had updated them cheerfully, letting them know how well things were going. She assured them that she would call them if anything changed, but that they could go home and have dinner, if they wanted to, because their father would be sleeping, and not able to interact with them for several hours yet. Leaving the family in the ICU waiting room talking about transportation, gas money, and other practicalities, I fully expected them to go home, especially since they said they didn't have money to buy dinner in the cafeteria.

Instead, when I passed that waiting room more than an hour later, there was a large group seated around the original three family members. They were clearly settled in, some watching TV, so I went in to meet them. The odor of unwashed bodies was heavy in the air now, and many members of the family were wearing clothes that were in need of laundering. Someone had brought sandwiches, large bags of chips, and other snacks "from home," they said, so they'd been able to have dinner in the waiting room together. Without thinking I asked whether they wouldn't have been more comfortable at home, but was told that no one in the family had a space big enough to hold everyone, except for one cousin, and she hadn't been able to pay her electric bill recently, so even though her living room would hold everyone, it was pretty cold there. And suddenly that bare, clinical waiting room seemed transformed.

That waiting room is a place that is large enough to accommodate the family, yes—but it's also warm enough. It's relatively pleasant, and there is clean, hot and cold running water and a restroom nearby. Clearly, not every member of this family had access to these things at home. The waiting room is also a place that is *safe* for everyone. It's also a place that is regularly cleaned. And the family can gather knowing that everyone will be accommodated, even if the chairs are not the most comfortable. There is electricity, cable TV, and a charging station for those who have phones—phones don't work unless they're charged. Think about this. These qualities of the waiting room are all things that we take for granted—I know I do.

And yet there are many, many people, in Clarke County, and around the world, who lack the things that were in that waiting room. Either because of war, or poverty, or both, millions of

people lack things that they need. In today's gospel Jesus quotes the Torah, the sacred law of his people, when he tells the Pharisees that the second greatest commandment is 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' All our lives as Christians we've been told this, and certainly we work towards doing this at Christ Church. For instance, the pantry serves more clients all the time, and we will be expanding the services in the new year. We assist clients in connecting with social services, counseling, home repair, and many other services. We'll also be collecting turkeys for our neighbors' holiday meals—the dates for that are in your weekly updates.

And now we are also bringing music to the community. With our concert series, every month there is a jaw-dropping performance available to everyone through a freewill offering. People pay what they can afford to pay—and if that is *nothing*, then that heart-lifting, soul-satisfying concert is free. Seeing our food pantry clients at a Wednesday's concert helped me to see what a gift to the community this is.

But think—none of these services would exist if the church weren't here. If Christ Church Millwood weren't here, there would be no Christ Church Cares Food Pantry, there would be no concert series. There would be no community of faith reaching out in *many* ways to love our neighbors. There would be no worship, no organ or choir, no Adult Forum, or Sunday School or nursery care. The church, and our response to Jesus's call to love God, and love our neighbors, is important, both for our neighbors, and for us. Supporting the church, as the church, enables all of these things to happen.

Soon you will be receiving a stewardship letter. I ask you to read it and consider it prayerfully. Think about how you are called to support Christ Church, and all that it stands for.

That big family in the hospital waiting room was so grateful for that space, and the support, and their father's successful surgeries. Before I left them we stood in a circle, holding hands, and they gave thanks for the many blessings that God had given them.

God has richly blessed us. Let us see how we can bless others. Amen.

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