

A Cloud of Giving Witnesses

October 23, 2011

Hebrews 11 - 23

This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, grace and peace be with you all.

This morning we continue our 2012 stewardship theme: "Saints Alive: Living Generously." The aim of this theme is to know a generous God. The goal of this theme is to guide us all to more generous living.

It is appropriate to be considering the topic of people who live generously when we have 32 high school sophomores affirming their baptism. Many people have been generous with these teens and because of that sharing, these young people have been shaped in marvelous ways for life-long faithfulness.

As we started this series "Living Generously" two weeks ago, Pastor Heather spoke about being shaped for generous living and she gave us the assignment 1) to think of someone who has shaped you for generous living.

I've been thinking about generous people in my life. There are and have been so many. When I listened to the bible reading today from Hebrews I realized again that there are generations of people who have been generous: Abel, Noah, Abraham were a few mentioned. They form that cloud of witnesses around us. Since Pastor Heather gave us that assignment, I've been reading the Psalms as part of my morning devotions as way of thinking about who has shaped me for generous living. The Psalms tell of people showing generous faith, trust and honesty. So I'm ready to give a report on someone who has shaped me for generous living.

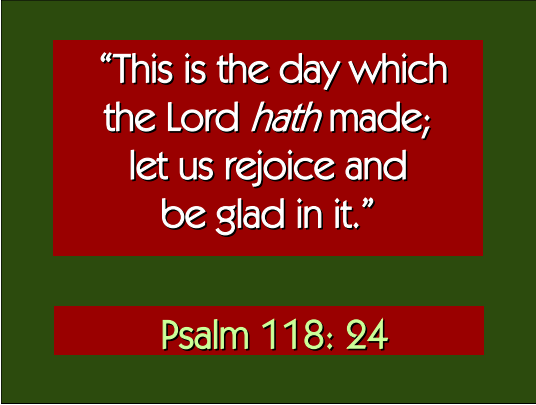


My brother and I were five years old when we were new kids in the Sunday School at Bethany Lutheran Church. Every Sunday our parents would take us to the large room where several classes met together for the "opening exercise" (I think that's what they called it). Mrs. Johnson led this portion before we went to our classes for Sunday School each week. She was larger than life when I was little. She was so gentle and warm. Looking back, Mrs. Johnson was for me the first voice of God's comfort and grace beyond the family in which I was so securely nestled.

Each Sunday we sat on little chairs in the Fireside Room all neatly arranged in rows with the other teachers standing alongside the wall. It was always Mrs. Johnson in front, smiling at us and somehow bringing a room full of young children into learning of God and Jesus. A smile was never absent from her face; her voice always calm and expressive. Mrs. Johnson never got angry with us - even when Brian Jensen thought he'd be cute and pull the little chair away from behind

me when it was time to sit down and hear another Bible story. Down I went. It was not that far to the floor, but my pride was hurt. But there was Mrs. Johnson to pick me up, brush me off and comfort me. As I recall, she didn't get angry with Brian, though firm with him, was gentle too.

Each Sunday Mrs. Johnson would begin, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." I remember feeling sorry for Mrs. Johnson that she didn't know how to say "has" and always said "hath" instead. But after those words she led us on with songs and Bible stories. We learned songs from her while Mrs. Beranek played the piano. We sang. "Into my heart, into my heart, Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Come in today; come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus." Mrs. Johnson knew so many songs by heart and she taught them all. She was the best.



"This is the day which
the Lord *hath* made;
let us rejoice and
be glad in it."

Psalm 118: 24

It was years later (I don't recall when) that I learned the words "This is the day the Lord hath made" were from Psalm 118. I will admit that at first I was shocked. I thought they were Mrs. Johnson's words and now I was learning that they were right from the Bible. The "hath" was from the old King James version - and she really could say "has." It was then that I began to grasp how generous this saint of a woman had been to me. I came to see the generosity of what I had received from the lips and heart of Jeannette Johnson (yes, I also came to learn she had a first name!) The words from Psalm 118:24 are ingrained within me. I have Jeannette to thank for that.

There have been many generous people in my life like Mrs. Johnson who form my cloud of giving witnesses. They're all people who know how to live generously. And from them I've learned two key things about GOD and living generously:

1 Generous people point us to God, who is the source of all generosity.

Through their serving, giving of themselves and sharing their resources, they bless and encourage others.'

2 Generous people are the hands and heart of Jesus here and now. They live poised to enact generosity in attitude and action. They make a difference forever.

God was good in placing Mrs. Johnson in my cloud of giving witnesses. Even now, I can hear her saying: "This is the day the Lord hath made" and I still use this Psalm at the start of the day. It reminds me of generous Mrs. Johnson but more so of the God who is first and always most generous to me. From that thought at the start of each day, I'm better prepared to live generously. May it be true for you, too. Amen.