

The Lutheran Church of the Atonement  
Florissant, Missouri  
Proper 9 -- Year C  
July 3, 2022  
Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:1-16  
St. Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

"People Give To People." That was the headline on the lead article in last week's edition of "Ministry Matters," a weekly e-mail newsletter from the United Methodist Church. "People Give To People." This is an insight that most folks who have done any kind of fund-raising have learned early on. Yes, people do give money, often modest amounts, to worthy causes and institutions, and projects. But, most of us know this from our own experience, that, if a good friend calls and says that he or she is deeply committed and heavily involved in raising funds for a worthwhile endeavor, somehow, our wallet or purse opens just a little bit wider. We have a relationship with this person. We know this person. We trust this person. We care about what this person cares about. My wife and I have even given money to a candidate from that "other" political party, because we know him. We trust him. He's a good person. To be sure, the cause is important, but there are a million worthy causes out there. What ultimately matters is the relationship. "People Give To People."

Awhile back, I was listening to KFYO, the Lutheran radio station in town, when the speaker insisted that what the Christian Faith is all about is "information." What matters, he suggested, is that people be given the right information about God, about what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, about how God wants us to live (once we get the right information)...the implication clearly being that the task of the Church is to do a better job of getting out this "information." Thus, if people simply had better information, the correct information, they would come cascading back to the Church.

To all of which I could not help but offer a hearty "Yes, But...!" Yes, information is important, but so are

on-going relationships. Yes, knowing what you're talking about is important, but so is how we do that talking. Yes, getting the story of God straight is important, but so is bringing people into God's loving embrace. Yes, information is important, but it's important for the purpose of creating and building and sustaining and strengthening relationships.

Let me approach this by means of two seasonal analogies. Independence Day weekend may be the one time when folks (other than historians) discuss our nation's founding, the one time when names like George Washington and Betsy Ross and Benjamin Franklin become a part of everyday conversation. We may even visit places like Lexington and Valley Forge and Yorktown that represent milestones in our development as a free people. As this happens, we are reminded of important "information" about the courage and the sacrifices and the ideals that launched this nation as a glorious experiment in democratic Federalism. Even as historians are again debating whether Paul Revere was as heroic as we always thought or whether Benedict Arnold was as treasonous as we always thought, this "information" really makes no difference. What does make a difference is how all this impacts our current relationship with our nation, whether we are exhibiting the same courage, the same self-sacrifice, the same high ideals that made this nation great. "Information" is important, but only insofar as it "informs" and affects our relationship with our nation today, only insofar as it forces us to ask, "What can I sacrifice to enhance the freedom, security, and well-being of others?"

My second analogy -- I'll make this one quicker -- for some of us this is wedding anniversary time, a time to reflect on how we first met, where we went on our first date, what our favorite songs were, and the like. Even then, one of us can say, "Remember when we were at the Parkmoor and first talked about getting married?" to which the other will reply, "I seem to

recall that we were actually at Cyrano's." What matters is not accurate "information" about what exactly happened back then as much as how whatever happened back then drew us into a relationship which has been continually reaffirmed and strengthened and matured into the present. Where we made our vows is less important than the certainty that we are living out those vows -- in forgiveness and trust -- today! Our relationship is established and confirmed, not by settling the question of who we were back then, but by engaging the issue of who we will be for each other today and tomorrow.

Today's Second Lesson contains a line that can easily be misunderstood: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." As I noted two weekends ago, Paul often uses the word "law" in the sense of the Hebrew word "Torah," which refers not so much to a written code as it does to "wisdom" and "guidance." All of which suggests that Paul here is using "Law...Torah" not in the sense of a legal code as "information" to regulate our behavior, but rather as the wisdom of Christ, the guidance of Christ, setting out a pattern for living that forms and sustains relationships. "Bearing one another's burdens" is about Christ-like sacrifice for the sake of others, about conforming our lives to Christ's, about living in faithfulness to God and to God's people. Indeed, the Christian Faith has grown throughout the world for 2,000 years, not simply because people-of-faith had the right "information," but because people-of-faith, bearing one another's burdens, drew people into the life of Christ, not simply because we had the right "information" about the Resurrection, but because in Christ's Church people experienced the love of God at work through the Risen Christ to make lives whole. Indeed, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus sends out the 70, not to impart "information" but to form relationships.

In fact, all of our three Lessons today are about God's yearning to be in relationship with us. And, we continue in that relationship, not simply by having the right "information," but by living in the presence of God through Word, Sacrament, and Christian fellowship. Just think of those in our own family of faith who may never have the capacity to assimilate "information" but who live in relationship with God, because Christian people are "bearing their burdens and so fulfilling the wisdom of Christ."

Yes, "information" is important; yes, Christian truth is vitally important! There's too much nonsense out there that leads people away from Christ and His love. But, that Christian truth stands in the service of our relationships with God and with each other. For, Jesus didn't "inform" lepers; He healed them. Jesus didn't quiz little children; He took them in His arms and blessed them. Jesus didn't instruct the outcasts; He welcomed them back into community. Jesus didn't analyze the effects of sin; he forgave sinners. Jesus didn't lecture on the importance of self-giving sacrifice for others; He sacrificed His own life on the Cross to draw you and me into a life-giving relationship with His Father and into a life-enhancing relationship of mutual "burden-bearing." Amen