

All Saints Sunday, November 6, 2011  
Christ the Lord, Pinole  
Revelations 7:9-17  
Psalm 34:1-10, 22  
I John 3:1-3  
Matthew 5:1-12

Millions of Americans have lost their jobs. Millions more are underemployed. Retirees have lost much of their financial nest eggs.

Young and old alike are camped out in public parks. They are desperate and angry. Many Americans are fearful of what the future holds.

Into this sea of fear, anxiety and desperation comes a strong voice on a cool spring day. Across the public address speakers and across the air waves, Americans hear, “So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

With those words in March of 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt sought to reassure a nation mired in the deepest depression in history. The new President wanted people to know there was hope, there was a way forward, and there was an antidote to mind numbing fear.

Roosevelt went on to say, “In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things. Values have shrunk to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

“More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.

“Yet our distress comes from no failure of substance. We are stricken by no plague of locusts. Compared with the perils which our forefathers conquered because they believed and were not afraid, we have still much to be thankful for. Nature still offers her bounty and human efforts have multiplied it. Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply.”

Today, we must hear those words along with the words of the psalmist, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every

trouble. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.”

Imagine that for a moment, God’s angel encamping around you and delivering you from every trouble. Imagine being so surrounded by God’s love that every fear was washed away and your vision for today and the future was filled with hope and new possibilities.

How would we respond differently if we believed, truly believed in that kind of all-encompassing love and protection?

Today, I ask you to consider that question as you consider your pledge to God’s work through Christ the Lord.

When I was a child, my one brother and three sisters and I lived a relatively comfortable life in the foothills of Southern California. My father was an advertising

executive and my mother was a stay at home mom who spent much of her time running a variety of church programs for our Episcopal church and for the Diocese of Los Angeles. We lived in a beautiful home with plenty of space indoors and out.

My father paid all the bills, made the decisions about what kinds of cars and what kinds of appliances we would have.

My mother made the decision about which church she and her children would attend. My father attended maybe on Christmas or if one of us was performing.

So pledging was my mother's responsibility and it came out of the \$144 bi-weekly allowance my father gave her to buy the food for the whole family and the clothes for her and us five kids. She saved every

left over. We still joke about the minute plastic containers that might hold a tablespoon full of peas for future use in a meat loaf or stew.

So out of that \$144 every two weeks came food, clothing, money for her Christmas savings account (she also bought most of our Christmas gifts), and a pledge to our church. And that pledge was always a tithe of her resources. Every two weeks, she would put \$14.40 in the pledge envelope and then in the plate as it was passed around. I know there were times when she felt like there wasn't enough money to take care of the necessities, but her faith kept her from becoming fearful and miserly.

Years later, when she was helping my grandmother and her bookkeeping, I heard her protest to my grandmother, who attended two different Episcopal

churches in San Diego County that she didn't need to tithe to both!

I have to admit that my wife Judy and I have not achieved my mother's sense of generosity—let alone my grandmother's! Right now, we give between 5 & 6% of our income to the two churches we consider ourselves members-- All Saints, Pasadena, and St. James, South Pasadena.

We always try to see our pledges in a proportional way and struggle with how we can increase the proportion of what we are giving. So if last year we gave 6% of our income to the church, can we increase to 7% or 8% this year?

That's what I ask you to consider. Look at what you are giving to Christ the Lord to support the mission and ministry God is calling this church to. Figure out

what percentage that is of your household income. Then pray about increasing that percentage by 1 or 2 percent. The difference that would make in your life would be fantastic. Increasing your giving would open up new doors of generosity and joy to you and your family.

Prayerfully consider bringing your standard of giving in line with your standard of living.

Having said that, I want to underscore the truth that God's love is free. We can do nothing to earn it. We can't buy it. And we can do nothing to lose it. Your pledge—your giving will not make God love you more or love you less. God created us to love us and God can do nothing else but love us.

The entire Bible is filled with stories of God's love for us—no matter what. Prophet after prophet, story

after story, we hear of God's call to us to be in relationship. God is a persistent lover. No matter how many times we fail God, God never fails to try again.

Throughout human history, we hear the stories of God trying to reach out to us and us ignoring the call. Today, it would be like us looking at the caller id on our phones and pushing the little ignore button—time, after time, after time.

What would happen if we pushed the “accept” button instead? What would happen if we trusted the caller on the other end? What would happen if we grabbed that faith and held it close and called it our own?

I know church members who do that. I've heard their stories—and so have you. The man who is

unemployed but still pledges as part of his commitment to God's work in the world. The woman who is about to be forced out of her position but is maintaining her optimism and faith—and committed to increasing her pledge for next year. The long-time member whose expectations of financial security have been dashed by this economy but gives as generously as she can.

The church is also blessed with stories of extraordinary wealth and extraordinary generosity. But the norm is ordinary abundance and less than ordinary giving. We can change that. Each of us can renew our faith and strengthen our generosity. We might not be able to do it on our own, but we can do it as a community of believers in a generous, caring, loving, awesome God.

On the night before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King was at a prayer meeting in Memphis. He asked the minister to lead the group in singing King's favorite hymn, "Precious Lord." These are the words that gave comfort and inspired Dr. King:

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;

Through the storm, through the night,

Lead me on to the light, take my hand

Precious Lord, lead me on.

These days, I know many of us feel tired and worn. For some of us, our faith—especially when money is involved may seem weak. Today, I call you to ask God for the help, the strength to be generous.

Just dream for a minute about what it would be like if each one of us, as we considered our pledge and as we filled out the pledge card this morning, asked, “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand.”

Oh the glory of that kind of faith and the work that could be done in God’s name with that kind of generosity.

Amen