

Scripture: Luke 8:4-8; Deuteronomy 24:19-20

Sermon Title: "What Will We Leave Behind?"

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Now that we have snow on the ground, I feel that it is culturally appropriate and socially acceptable for me to talk about winter. Yes, whether we like it or not, it is turning colder and we will be seeing more of that white stuff out there soon enough. And as the temperatures get lower, our awareness for the needs that surround us tend to increase as we look toward keeping others warm, fed, and safe in the winter months. Now, for the past several years, nearly during every winter season, I have seen a news story or two about how communities have been helping the homeless among them, even if in small ways. For instance, one of the ways that folks have been engaging recently in keeping others warm is by leaving behind in public spaces handmade scarves, hats, and gloves or even other clothing for anyone in need to take and utilize in the chilly weather.

In 2015, there was an article in USA Today which spoke of a couple ways in which people were doing this. They reported on a woman in Portland, Maine who took five dollars, turned it into five pieces of warm clothing from the local Goodwill, and placed these articles of clothing around the city with a note saying, "I am not lost! Please take me if you need me." The second included a town very close to my heart, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where a group called Wrap Up Lancaster, would decorate fences and railings with scarves and hats for the housing insecure to take and to make them a little warmer. When this particular article was written, the group had just placed 155 hats and 58 scarves around Lancaster and neighboring Columbia. In their own ways, these two acts of caring were achieved by the individuals involved taking from what they had and leaving a portion behind to bless and care for someone in need.

In the book of Deuteronomy, a book containing many laws for the Israelite people in their time of wandering and wondering what the future would hold, we hear the call

which was shared with us this morning to leave a portion of the harvest behind.

According to these Hebrew Scriptures, if there is grain left in the field after harvest, it should remain and after an olive tree is shaken, everything still on the tree shall stay put in order that the foreigner, the widows, and the orphans may have something to eat – so that the less fortunate in society may be taken care of. To leave a portion of the harvest behind to share the bounty with neighbors, both Israelites and non-Israelites, who are experiencing a time of need in their lives.

I have been drawn all week to this idea of leaving behind a portion of the harvest on the field for those who come along in need of nourishment. And for us today, this may not look like a corner of the field left untouched or fruit still hanging from the tree (though such gleaning does exist in our day and age – a recent article in the Wiscasset Newspaper in August talked about gleaning corn from the fields for local food pantries). But while for many of us our harvests may not look like fields of crops, we certainly have a harvest in our lives. And so thinking of all the things, the moments, the time, the talents, the treasures that bring life, that nourish, that are blessings to us, thinking of this as our harvest, I believe it is our call to love our neighbor by leaving a bit behind so that others may find life, nourishment, and blessing. Maybe it's in scarves or hats, smiles or handshakes, simply sitting with someone or helping them through a challenge. No matter what, when we are willing to leave something behind for another, we live out our faith.

This morning has been a celebration of how we do this work and how we each leave a little behind to do a whole lot of good together. With each good gift of time, talent, and treasure that we share, we ensure that when our worship service ends each week and we head home, that we have left behind here in this place, a ministry which is here for the congregation and community for the week to come. A place where spiritual care and nurture are just a phone call, an email, or a drop in at the office away. A place that is not just in a community but strives to be a part of and respond to the needs of the

community. One thing I'm thinking of as the holidays roll around is how last year, we were able to help respond to the need of our community and bring Christmas a little cheer to some families in need by helping to coordinate gifts for families in the absence of a town Christmas gift program. That was made possible by the portions of our harvest that we leave behind here so that this church and this congregation can be a living presence among the people to nurture and breathe life into the lives of those around us. All of what we do here in this place is made possible by the gifts of time, talent, and treasure we are willing to leave behind in order that another's life, those sitting next to us today, or our neighbors, or the strangers we pass each day may find a blessing in what we are called to do here together.

We fulfill this call to leave behind a portion to bless others in our shared ministry here and we should do this in all of our living as well. This past week, as I was pondering this scripture and the idea of leaving something behind, I was reminded of an idea around Advent, which will be here before we know it. And yes, I know it is a bit of a faux pas to start talking about Advent and a journey toward Christmas before Thanksgiving but it's fitting for us today so forgive me for jumping ahead for a moment. I'm sure many of you have gotten before or have seen Advent Calendars, where from Dec 1 to Dec 24, you open a little door, read a scripture, and get a little treat (often chocolate!) However, in what should be a season of giving, sharing, and caring, I am in the process of crafting an Advent Calendar inspired by other models that have been used by clergy other individuals before, which will encourage a good deed each day. You will find out more how to participate in the weeks to come, but this is essentially calling us to be mindful of what we can leave behind us this Advent to share hope, peace, joy, and love with those around us. Trusting that what we do will breathe life into our world as we journey toward a celebration of a life which breathed hope into our world.

Beloved people of God, each day, not just at Thanksgiving or only in the season of Advent, may we start small and ask, "what will we leave behind us this day?" What will we share with another in order that their life may find life more abundant? What will we do, or say, or give so that others may come to be blessed by the blessings that we hold? And if this is the way we live our life, always conscious of what we can leave behind and are willing to do just that, our life becomes not only a living thanksgiving, but a seed to grow something even more for the good of our neighbors, the good of our world, as we live the goodness of our God. For when we share of ourselves with good in mind, we plant in the most fertile soil, where justice, righteousness, and peace do grow. And when it grows, may we always leave a little bit more behind to plant a new seed once more. So be it and may it be so. Amen.