

Sermon for “Women’s Thankoffering” Service

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Good morning! First of all, I would like to thank our WELCA committee for asking me to preach the sermon today. This is such an honor on this special and meaningful day.

As we make our Thankofferings today, we share in a tradition that goes back to the 1800s or maybe even earlier. Back then, when it seemed that there was not enough money to carry out the work of the church, the women would act together as “cent” or “mite” societies. Each woman would set aside offerings at home throughout the year in thanksgiving for blessings received. And on occasion, the women would come together as we do today, joining their offerings together to support ministry of many kinds.

When Women of the ELCA was formed in 1987, we committed to continue this tradition of giving in gratitude for blessings. Each year, in thousands of congregations, Thankofferings are given to support the life-changing ministries of Women of the ELCA. Together, we do more than we could ever do apart.

In gratitude for all God has given to us, and with hope for all that is to come, we now give our thankoffering.

The common theme running through the scripture passages that were read this morning is that of water. As you know, water is as important to life as the air we breathe and the sun on our faces. The abundance or lack of water affects every living thing. Even in the desert, life blooms when it rains. Here at Nativity, we bloom when God rains His blessings upon us.

I am sure that each and every one of us has tested God or questioned his reasons for things that have happened to us or our loved one. In today’s first lesson from Exodus, the Israelites tested the Lord and demanded water. In desperation, Moses asked God for a miracle. God told him to strike a rock, which caused the badly needed water to flow from it.

Today’s Psalm described the various sources and ways that we use water. It talks about how God set a boundary for the waters from the mountains so that they may never cover the earth again and how He makes the springs gush through the valleys, giving water to the wild animals and birds. And how God waters the earth, making the grass, trees, and crops grow to feed His people.

In today’s lesson from Ephesians, in Paul’s letter to Titus, one of his fellow disciples, he writes of the grace of God that allows him to spread the Good Word. He calls himself “the least of all the saints”, but in the coming weeks, we will learn how powerful he becomes through his teachings.

The verses from the Gospel of John tells the story of the Samaritan woman that Jesus encountered at a well. He tells her about the living water of God’s blessings and then reveals Himself to her.

You know how when you drop a stone in a pond, the water radiates out from the initial splash that the stone makes when it hits the water, causing ripples in the pond? That’s what I call “the ripple effect”.

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, He made such a powerful impact on her, in part because He treated her as an equal, not someone from a lower class or inferior culture. He shared the good news with her, translating it in terms that she could understand, so that she was able to go into her village to spread His word. He trusted her to be a disciple, even though she was a woman. He dropped a stone in a pond when He shared the good news and the ripple effect was set in motion when she returned to her village.

There is a long history of women disciples, teachers and leaders of Jesus’ good news. In the years since His crucifixion, women have struggled to maintain their right to spread the good word. A sea change began in the 1890’s when the female abolitionists demanded the right to vote. As the womens’ voices were heard, their power grew. When their men went off to fight in World War I, they took on the jobs left behind. When the men came back, most of the women graciously went back to their homes. However, after World War II, they were maybe not as gracious and hung on to their new

identifies as working women, a new tradition continuing to this day. In the 1970's we earned the right to attend seminary and become ordained ministers of God.

While I was at Seminary last week, I came across this poem in one of my textbooks by Phoebe Hannaford. In it, she wrote about the role of women in the world:

“Their lives have shown that naught can stay the tide
Of God's great purpose in its onward flow;
That where man nobly labors for the race,
There too, may women, at God's summons, go.”

Here at Nativity, we are blessed with many women who “go at God's summons” and serve others, causing ripples of their own. These groups include Crafty Ladies, Altar Guild, Cards R Us, Choir, Mary Joy Circle, Days for Girls, Ushers, Assisting Ministers, Food Pantry volunteers, Women of Nativity, and our bulletin folders.

These ripples occur both within and outside of our church. They affect blessed fellowship among our members and this fellowship is extended to the people helped by the missions in our community and beyond our church walls.

These beautiful quilts that are draped over the pews and decorate our sanctuary this morning are a stunning example of the ripple effect - our “Crafty Ladies” sewing group get together every Friday morning to cut and arrange the fabric squares, stitch them together and tie off the quilts. These women are not only enjoying each other's fellowship, they are making an impact on the people who receive and use these quilts.

Days for Girls is another wonderful example of this ripple effect: each week, our women get together and sew the pads and bags, again, sharing fellowship, their concerns and hopes while working. The kits get sent to the girls so that they can continue with their daily lives - not hiding at home. This helps their self-esteem, the continuity of their education and their families' financial situation if they have jobs. The families' improved finances, in turn, help the local economy. See - ripple effect!

I often remind our two grandchildren, Ashley and Jayson, that, as a Child of God, you must always be mindful of your mission and the impact you have on those you encounter every day.

While I was in and out of the hospital this past fall, I felt so overwhelmed by the many cards, visits, telephone calls, taxi service offers and meals that came from so many of you. When I thanked people for their generosity, they told me that they were happy to do things for the four of us. This willingness to help was because they were grateful for what they had perceived having received from us over the past eleven years that we have been members of Nativity. This has been very humbling to me to realize that I have had a ripple effect on you and your families simply by doing what and where I felt the Holy Spirit was leading me.

Remember, each of you can have an impact on each person you meet as you go about your daily life. And you have a choice with each encounter. You can simply go on with your day or you can embrace the moment and extend the love from God that was poured over your head at your baptism. Make that light from Him shine from you to others.

Amen.