

Journey to St. Luke

Pastor Rose taught us that the best prayer was also one of the shortest. So let me start with it.

Dear God – Thank you. Amen

We have been members here for about six years. We belonged to First Pres in DG for over 20 years. Before that we were at Valley Pres in Golden Valley Minnesota for about six years. We were married in the Presbyterian Church in Louisiana, Mo., the church Barbara attended for 21 years. So, we have a long history with the Presbyterian Church.

We left First Presbyterian of Downers Grove for several reasons with the main one being the lack of inclusion that we felt was present at First Presbyterian. This was most evident in the lack of inclusion based on sexual orientation and also who was fit to be ordained or serve in leadership. Had the position just been that homosexuality was wrong and un-Biblical we might have continued to be part of First Presbyterian. But the position was that homosexual males were pedophiles and they were not able to live a Christian life. That homosexuality was a life choice over which people had the ability to choose. That they were intentionally choosing to sin. The offenses were many according to the majority of the congregation and to the session. We sought a more welcoming congregation - a church that would welcome not only us, but others as well.

St. Luke welcomed us and indeed seemed to welcome all who sought a church. It is a guiding principle of our congregation then and now. We reach out to visitors. We reach out to the community. We reach out to mission causes. Most of all we reach out to one another.

When we left First we never gave a thought to not continuing in the church. We have received much more than we have given in our time as church people. Barb and I often remind each other how blessed we are. Through the years we have been blessed with three wonderful children. They are loving, patient, kind; and of course super smart and beautiful and blessed with super smart and beautiful children of their own – we have pictures of the grandchildren if you would like to see proof. We have had some success in our professional lives. We have enough material possessions to satisfy us. This is not to say that life has always been a bed of roses. As with Job in the lectionary there have been some obstacles and challenges in our lives. These have been in both the professional and personal arenas. Were they tests of our faith from God? Perhaps. Well probably. No, most certainly.

I think I was asked to speak today to tell some of my story of making choices about Faith and what motivated me to choose as I have. It is easy to accept a benevolent and loving God. It is easy to continue on the church path when it is a walk in the park. When there are no tests from God or they are easy ones. However, when there are major challenges Faith can be difficult to maintain. It is good to think that good things are gifts from God. If we accept that then ills must also be from God. In Job it is recorded that God visited ills onto Job to test his faith. After Job held to his faith, God rewarded him with many treasures on earth. However, I am not sure that having thousands of camels, sheep and oxen to clean up after is quite the treasure I would choose from God. Job did not always meet the tests with complete acceptance or with understanding. He had a dialog with God with the frequent theme being

“Hey God, what’s going on here.” But, Job persevered and held to his Faith. If we accept this idea of a testing God, one who tests our Faith, then I suppose I have been tested through the years and most especially the years leading up to 2011.

Through the recent years I have been in a hospital many times. In 2011 I was hospitalized about six times. I have had various maladies to include removal of my gall bladder (surgery), repair of an umbilical hernia (surgery), a perforated bowel (surgery) and a liver transplant (surgery) and a repair of the liver transplant (surgery) and debilitating pain from a damaged nerve (procedure to kill the offending nerve) and a stroke. Much of this was brought on by a genetic disease that caused my liver to go into failure and to shrink to about 10% of its natural size. Death was a real possibility several times during this time.

But did my faith waver? Did I ever doubt my faith in God? You betcha my faith wavered and there was doubt – many times. But waver is not the same as my faith failing me - or abandoning me. And doubt is not denial. Like Job, did I also have a dialog with God about “Hey, what’s happening here?” Sure did. Each person has his own expression of Faith. In my dialog most of the conversation from my side did not deal with “why me?”. It did not deal with heal me and I will be a better person and do good works. It dealt with reflection. It dealt with lessening the load on my family, especially my wife, Barb. Her support and care during this time was a true expression of love – a true expression of for better or worse – a true expression of love is patient and love is kind. When the chance of a life saving transplant was slim, a doctor friend told me that she believed me to be at peace and accepting of my fate. I know that was an accurate observation. The peace came from several sources, significantly from my Faith.

We recently attended a retreat wherein we tried to identify spiritual gifts. One of the gifts was the gift of healing. No one thought she had that gift. No one thought that he could lay hands upon someone and bring about healing as Jesus did. Most of the time Jesus would lay a healing hand or the afflicted would touch his robe. However, in the Mark reading Jesus only had to speak to Timaeus to heal his blindness. Though I do not think I have ever been physically touched by a healing hand, I do believe in the gift of corporate healing. I believe in the power of prayer. The power of prayers of healing. Later in the service we are going to ask for joys and concerns from the congregation. I was the target of many such corporate prayers from St. Luke. I believe that I felt a spiritual healing hand. Not because I was especially deserving. Not because God had some special plan or intention for me. But I did accept and know that He had a reason for the presence of the healing hand. I have Faith that He did indeed “Hear our prayer” for me from St. Luke.

My thoughts today are not just about my journey to St. Luke and God’s tests of my faith. It is also about why I give to St. Luke. My faith does not dictate a tit for tat. The “the church gives to me and I give to the church” trade is not it. I believe in a cheerful – and willing – giver approach. I give of my time, talent and treasure to St. Luke. When I think of the good things that St. Luke does it makes me happy to give. Whether those good things are PADS, contributing to food pantries, or visiting me in the hospital both here and in Rochester, Minnesota, at the Mayo Clinic, does not make much difference. Good work is good work. I truly enjoy working around the church in the gardens or doing maintenance around the building. The people I encounter when I am about the church or doing retreats or going to Bible study truly bring joy to my heart and a smile to my lips. Garrison Keiler, the humorist and social commentator,

attends church in Minnesota both in St. Paul and at Lake Wobegon. When asked why he goes to church his answer is "I like organ music and I like being around nice people". I've told Bonnie many times how much I enjoy her playing. Now I am telling you all - I really like being around the nice people at St. Luke.

My closing prayer is very similar to my opening prayer. But now it is perhaps more in context and even more meaningful, especially to me.

Dear God,

Thank you.

Amen