

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Ephesians 4:1-16

Grace to you, and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I like reading the comics, especially on Sunday (although it was pointed out to me a couple of weeks ago that I very rarely get to read the Sunday morning comics on Sunday morning. - it's usually more like Sunday evening that I finally get to read the comics, but that is beside the point). But maybe you saw in last Sunday's comics, the **Hi & Lois** comic strip - it's the one with a family of six folks. Well anyway, one of the children was telling her father about a new holiday she had just invented. Dot explains to her father: "The great mermaid lives deep beneath the ocean in the city of Atlantis. Every year she goes on a long journey, riding on a giant whale filled with presents for good boys and girls. All over the world children go down to the seaside to greet her and have a big celebration. Aquafest will always fall on the first Sunday in August." Now her father congratulates her on this wonderful story, but he asks her, do we really need another holiday? To which his young daughter replies: "Well yes, because there's no day between Easter and Halloween for kids to get stuff!"

We all like to receive gifts. Some of us received a gift tonight in the children's message, and all of us will receive a gift in a little bit, a different kind of a gift though. I am not all that adept at picking out gifts, especially when it comes to my wife. I usually have to ask her to tell me what to give her or go to one of her friends and go shopping with one of her friends. But I think we all like to RECEIVE gifts. Gifts do tend to be things that we WANT, not necessarily something that we NEED. Sometimes, though, we do get gifts that we need. I can remember many years ago for high school graduation I received an electric typewriter which I put to very good use while I was in college (for those of you who don't know what a typewriter is . . . I feel really old). Usually though we don't think of gifts as essentials for living. We might receive or give a gift certificate to a restaurant, but we don't think of going to Giant or Weis to stock up on milk, bread, hamburger, pasta, or whatever passes for the staples in your household. We don't think of that usually as gifts. But in both of our lessons tonight they did talk about gifts, although not in terms that we might usually think.

In our first lesson that we heard, as I was trying to explain with my example of cookies in the children's message a few moments ago, the children of Abraham were on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. They had to leave in a bit of a rush, and there wasn't a friendly McDonald's anywhere there in the desert for them to stop by. They were on the move, there were a lot of them on the move and while the saying is true that 'An army moves on its stomach', so does an exodus. The people are hiking; the people are hungry. They talk to Moses, who in turn talks to God, who, in a sign of compassion and as a sign of caring, sends Manna. Not only manna, but also quail. Now maybe this doesn't necessarily seem like a whole lot to us when all we have to do is stop in at the new Giant where you can have practically any gastronomic desire instantly fulfilled. And maybe you're not necessarily a fan of bread and bird, but to those people who had been struggling for years in Egypt, for those folks to whom food had been denied, to simply be able to walk outside of your tent and gather up some flaky white stuff that you could bake into bread and just be able to grab a Quail, not even have to hunt it down, but just reach out and grab hold of a Quail, this was a gift. A

simple, elegant, unexpected, gift.

In the letter to the Ephesians, the author is also talking about gifts. But again, not necessarily gifts in the terms that we might think. In verse 11 he starts writing:

The gifts that God made were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Now in those four verses, the gifts that Paul is talking about, they do tend on the one hand sound to be a little bit more administrative and they do differ from the list of gifts that we read about where Paul wrote to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 12, the scripture talks about the variety of gifts: some are called to the utterance of wisdom, some to the utterance of knowledge, some are called to the gifts of healing others the working of miracles and so on. But in this section of the letter to the Ephesians, the author points out that there are aspects to church or as we can better understand it, aspects to our life as Christians in community that stand out. And the first is simply that, we are Christians in community. This section also points out that church life, congregation life, Christian life is *creedal*. That all of us, **all** of us are gifted; and finally, that the Christian life is also about **caring** about one another. Let's take a brief look at each of those.

Communal: we are a community of Christ. We are the church. Yes we are gathered here in Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church at 2000 Chestnut Street, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania 17011. But the brick and the mortar and the steel beams and the wonderful wax job on the floor are not what make up Trinity. **We** make up Trinity. **We**, gathered together; **we**, sent out, *are* Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. Our faith, our congregational life, is *communal*.

We are also *creedal*. As we heard read to us tonight, Paul wrote we are "one body, one Spirit, . . . one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God." (vs. 4-6) **That** is what we believe, **that** is the essence of our creed. As we will say those words in a few minutes together using the words of the Apostles Creed, it will all say the same. Those are the things in which we believe, that is our Creed as Christian regardless of our background, regardless of our denomination. We are, together, believing in one Lord, one faith, one God.

We are *gifted* in many and various ways. Some of us indeed are gifted in those areas of administration as we heard in the letter. Some of us are gifted more along the lines of what Paul had written about earlier in 1 Corinthians. We are good each of us at something, some of us at many things. We are not all good at the same things and that is a wonderful thing.

And that is why again we need each other. We need to be in community to bring all of those gifts together so that together we can function, together we can we can be one, together then we can go on with that last one, in *caring* for one another. In being concerned about each other. That doesn't mean that we are to be the best of buddies with everybody here in our congregation. It doesn't mean that we are always going to be the best of friends with every Christian throughout the world, but it does mean that we do look out for each other. It does mean that we care for each other when someone in our community is hurting. When someone in the body of Christ is struggling, we go to help them, it doesn't matter if we really don't care for the way they dress or perhaps we had an

altercation with them at one time because they sat in my pew or whatever the reason might be, we are called to care for one another within the body of Christ.

We probably, at least most of us adults have heard that axiom, 'it is better to give than to receive' (I think that was one of Ben Franklin's "Poor Richard Almanac" sayings, but I am not sure of that). But still it gets across the essence, that, although we might enjoy RECEIVING gifts, I know that when I give a gift that honestly makes someone else happy, or I should say, more importantly, I should say makes them joyful, than I too am filled.

It is great to receive a gift like the Israelites did. The Israelites received something practical, something needed, it was indeed life sustaining. But, eventually, they came to see that gift of manna and quail not as a gift but as a RIGHT. They came to expect it from God, to demand it from God. In the letter to the Ephesians we are reminded that together **we** are the church. Together we look out for one another. Together we spread the message of Christ's love and forgiveness to all those around us. We're not in this walk of faith by ourselves, we have each other. We're not called to be the best of friends, but we ARE called to love and care for each other. So that as we heard in the closing words:

¹⁵Speaking in the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Let us work together in building up this body. Amen.