

Proper 28, Year B[Daniel 12:1-3](#)[Psalm 16](#)[Hebrews 10:11-14,19-25](#)[Mark 13:1-8](#)**The Challenge to Give Our All**

“Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the *blood* of Jesus. . . .” The author of the letter to the Hebrews talks this week of Jesus’ one time offering of himself as an offering of his blood. Now, before we dismiss this distasteful talk of the “blood” of Jesus as gross or barbaric, let me remind you of something. Last week, in our parish hall, 45 people gave their blood! That’s so amazing! Forty-five of you gave blood last week in support of the Tubre family. You gave, as they say, “the gift of life.” And that’s a great way of putting it, because that’s exactly how the author of the letter to the Hebrews would have understood it: blood = life. That’s how the Bible understands it, blood = life. You all who gave blood, or who at least tried to, did a very Christ-like thing first-off by simply giving, but also by giving your blood. God bless you all for that powerful gift.

Not only is giving your blood a very Christian thing to do, I’d go so far also to say it’s a very Louisianan thing to do. Have you ever taken the time to look at our Louisiana state flag? It depicts a mother pelican feeding her young. Ever notice what you see on the mother pelican’s breast? Three drops of blood. Now, on many older Louisiana flags the drops are missing, but on a proper Louisiana flag made since 2006 the drops are there. While doing some research for school, a student from Houma named Joseph Louiviere discovered old descriptions of the Louisiana state flag mentioning the three drops of blood on the pelican’s breast. Somehow, over time, the drops went missing from our flag.

A law based on Joseph's research was passed in 2006 ensuring future depictions of the seal on the flag would restore the drops of blood. If a mother pelican cannot find food for its young, it's said that the bird will tear meat from her own breast to feed them. She gives of herself. Our flag tells us, then, that our state must be willing to sacrifice itself for its citizens.¹ Based on the history of Louisiana politics that doesn't seem to be working out very well, but Louisianans are a people who will make sacrifices for each other. As many of you know very well, in this state, when we're at our best, we will give our all for our neighbors—a very Christian thing to do.

It is, after all, what our Savoir did. Jesus gives his all, once and for all. That's what the preacher of Hebrews is trying to teach us. Hebrews is billed as a letter like other letters of the New Testament, but it's much more like a sermon. And the preacher of Hebrews goes to great lengths to teach us that the old sacrifices performed in the temple by the old priests over and over again were insufficient truly to forgive sins. But, the blood of Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice was sufficient because it was a sacrifice made, not by human beings, but by God living in solidarity with us as a human being. What the author goes on to say is, "Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus," it's time to get to work. He's telling us that Jesus' "blood" was not for satisfying a "bloodthirsty God,"² but since blood is life it was about giving life to the whole world. He's telling us that "as baptized and forgiven people,

¹ Ed Anderson, "New Louisiana Flag With Bleeding Pelican Is Unfurled," *The Times Picayune* (New Orleans), November 23, 2010, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/11/state_officials_unfurl_newly-d.html.

² Thomas G. Long, *Feasting on the Word*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Year B, Volume 4 Season after Pentecost (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Kindle Edition)*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), Loc. 10907.

believers need not be crippled by guilt or fear, but can live before God with confidence.”³

We live in that confidence as part of a life-giving community empowered to be a community that encourages one another to do good.

We baptized two little boys at our school Eucharist last week. After the service one of them, who’s about 4, said to me, “I don’t feel my special powers yet. What will they be?” What we’re given is the power of the Spirit to do good, I told him. You’ll feel it the next time you’re given the opportunity to do something good. That power only grows stronger when we’re surrounded by a collaborative community of encouragement that’s willing to push us a little to help us grow more deeply into our life in Christ, to push us to use our powers. The letter to the Hebrews uses the word *provoke*. One of our jobs in community, says one writer, is to “stir up—if necessary, irritate—each other into fulfilling our [baptismal]” vows that we made a couple of Sundays ago on All Saints’ Day.⁴ We’re supposed to love each other, and lovingly to challenge each other. Church is a place where everyone should feel they belong, that people care about them, and where we should all feel challenged to grow.

That’s why we talk about giving in the church. To be a Christian is to be a mother pelican, a giver. Over the last couple of weeks, as we’re getting closer to Consecration Sunday next week, we’ve asked you to reflect on the question, “What is God calling you to give?” In a sense this is a broad question. What is God calling you to give of your life? In the broadest sense the answer is everything, because everything belongs to God, and our call is to give it all back. Specifically, though, next week you’re asked to decide what

³ Jane E. Fahey, *Feasting on the Word*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Year B, Volume 4, Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Kindle Edition)*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), Loc. 10810.

⁴ Fahey, Loc. 10821-10825.

portion of your income God is calling you to give to the life of St. Paul's.

People always get uncomfortable when we talk about money. If that's the case for you I invite you really to reflect on what it is that makes you uncomfortable. When I bring up money I notice people will deflect and say something like, "Well, giving is also about time and talent." Yes, that's very true. It certainly is, so please don't hear me trying to diminish that kind of giving because I'm not. It's important, and those are valid gifts. But what about money? Why does that make us so uncomfortable? Last week you were happy to give us *your blood*! We'll talk about giving of our time, our talents, heck even *our blood*, for goodness sake, but money . . . that's a whole different ballgame. What is it that's so intensely personal about our money? I invite you to think about that as you contemplate what God is calling you monetarily to commit to giving to the life of your church in 2016. The goal of Christian stewardship, whether we're talking about time, talent, or treasure, is the faithful management of *all* that God gives so that God can use our resources to transform us spiritually and to extend Christ's transforming love to others.

And, as you well know, that love needs extending. This past week as we've watched terrible news unfold in Beirut and Paris, news of "wars and rumors of wars," and we see how desperately the world needs Christ's transforming love. Jesus tells us not to be alarmed about such things. He says that such things are "but the beginning of the birth pangs," reminding us that because God is always at work, terrible things we witness become, in the end, the way for God to bring something new to life. That's the process of death and resurrection God has woven into the fabric of creation. Many of you may remember Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. As I've seen the chatter about Paris and Beirut on

social media a quotation from Mr. Rogers has popped up several times. He once said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” As Christians we are called to be those helpers, called to be resurrection people who give of ourselves for others in need like mother pelicans.

One simple way we can give ourselves to all those who are hurting right now is in prayer; prayer for both victims of violence and perpetrators. We can also find ways to share with the people around us, whether in person, on social media, or wherever we may be, the gospel values we hold dear: supportive community, solidarity with the suffering, resistance of evil, love of neighbor, love of enemy, justice, peace, respect for the dignity of all. You become a more faithful steward when you use the gifts and resources given to you to extend yourself to others in love by those kinds of values in Christ’s name. Just like so many of us found a way to be stewards who extended ourselves by giving our very blood in Christ’s name last week on behalf of the Tubre family. What did Mr. Rogers say about seeing scary things like children getting Leukemia? Look for the helpers.

I sincerely believe that the world needs giving churches like The Episcopal Church, churches like St. Paul’s. I believe the world needs what our new Presiding Bishop calls “Crazy Christians”: people crazy enough to extend the love of Christ into a broken and hurting world. The world needs more Louisianans, more life-giving mother pelicans, more crazy Christians willing to give our all with confidence by the blood of Jesus.

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