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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
November 18, 2012  
Psalms 118: Colossians 3:12-17  
"Gracias"

I decided after the bulletin was printed to read the New Testament text from Colossians in the middle of my sermon.

About a month ago a friend sent me a story via email and said, "Feel free to share." It's a good Stewardship Sunday illustration. Today is Stewardship Sunday and here's the story, told by a New York City cab driver:

I arrived at the address and honked the horn and after waiting a few minutes I honked again. Since this was going to be the last ride of my shift I thought about driving away, but instead I put the car in park and walked up to the door and knocked.. "Just a minute," answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 90's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie.

By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets.

There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she said. I took the suitcase to the cab then returned to assist the woman.

She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb.

She kept thanking me for my kindness. "It's nothing," I told her... "I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother to be treated."

"Oh, you're such a good boy, she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address and then asked, "Could you drive through downtown?"

"It's not the shortest way," I answered quickly...

"Oh, I don't mind," she said. "I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice."

I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. "I don't have any family left," she continued in a soft voice. "The doctor says I don't have very long."

I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "What route would you like me to take?" I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator.

We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl.

Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico.

Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

"How much do I owe you?" She asked, reaching into her purse.

"Nothing," I said

"You have to make a living," she answered.

"There are other passengers," I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly.

"You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you."

I squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light... Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life...

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away?

On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life.

I must admit that when I first read this story I was expecting in the end that the woman would say something like, “hold on a minute” and pull a check book from her purse and write him a check for a million dollars. I was looking for a fairytale ending.

The story is simpler than that. It’s an ordinary tale of kindness and generosity, grace given, joy received, devotion, respect for life, remembrance, deep connection, and the like – all worth much more than million dollars.

It’s a stewardship story for the church in that it puts into focus who we are and what we represent and it takes a New York City cab driver, this unlikely Christ figure, to show us.

We are stewards of the God-given qualities in this story and of the qualities expressed in God’s story book, the Bible. One of the best passages from God’s good book is the one from Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

It is not the lectionary reading, or church-appointed passage for the day. One of the reasons we have the lectionary is that pastors don’t preach over and over again on their favorites texts. The lectionary stretches us.

The Colossians text is one of my favorites which I pull out at every opportunity. It mirrors the taxi driver’s story and expands it. Paul writes:

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God...through him.”

Stewardship is about gratitude. It’s about giving thanks. In California, we say *gracias* just as much. Giving thanks is grace as English author, G. K. Chesterton, writes:

“You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.”

Chesterton is my kind of guy. All of life is an opportunity to give thanks. We know that there are times when it is difficult to give thanks but even in those times we deal with the struggle, pain, whatever, in one hand, and hold thanksgiving in the other hand. A thankful spirit prevails in the end.

With Chesterton, I say grace before the church. In other words, I give thanks to God for this church, for the wonderful ways it nurtures our spirits, the ways it meets us in our struggles through our prayers and community, and the ways it challenges us to make the world a better place.

On this Stewardship Sunday, let us give thanks and make our pledges from a thankful heart.

And while I'm about affirming thanksgiving, I'd like to wish you all Happy Thanksgiving – *Feliz Día de Acción de Gracias!* Amen.