

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church

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2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Psalm 116:12-19

WHAT SHALL WE RENDER TO THE LORD?

It's a three minute story in film which serves as an advertisement for a phone company in Thailand that it correctly hoped many would find and share on the internet. The action starts very quickly. A woman out in front of her shop has an eight or nine year-old boy by the arm. "Come out here, thief. What did you steal?" She grabs and looks at some medicine he had under his arm. "What are you going to do with this?" Not looking up, the boy replies, "Give it to my Mom." An adjacent shopkeeper sees what is happening and comes over saying, "Wait a second." He asks the boy, "Is your Mom sick?" The boy, still looking down, nods. The man then pays for the medicine and takes it from the angry shopkeeper. She yells at the boy, "And don't do it again!" The man then calls to his young daughter, "Sweetie! Veggie soup." She brings it in a bag, into which the man also puts the medicine, and hands it to the boy, who briefly looks up into the man's face before running off.

Then comes notice that the story has moved 30 years later. We are inside the male shopkeeper's small eatery where we watch him serving customers and see him once again giving food to someone in need. Suddenly there is a pained look on the man's face, he grabs his head and falls to the floor. His daughter, now a grown woman, comes running. The next scene shows the man seemingly unconscious in a hospital bed with a doctor standing beside him looking at films from a medical scan. Next shot is the daughter staring in dismay at a summary of medical expenses – 792,000 bahts which would be about \$22,000. Back to the eatery where we see a sign on the front door – "Urgent! For sale", with a phone number listed. The following scene shows the daughter once again at her father's side as he lies in bed. She picks up a note that has been left there - an updated summary of medical expenses. She stares in disbelief at the new total that would be owed: zero bahts. And then she reads the explanation. "All expenses paid 30 years ago with three packs of painkillers and a bag of veggie soup. Best regards, Dr. Prajak Arunthong." Then we see the tagline for the ad: "Giving is the best communication." ¹

I dare say that none of us has a life story quite like Dr. Arunthong's. If it is true that giving is the best communication, then God has been a very good communicator. God has given each one of us life itself. Every few seconds our lungs inhale the abundant oxygen we need to continue to live. Our hearts pump the life blood that supports our every cell. Given a night of rest in a warm abode, we woke up knowing who we are, able to remember meaningful events from our past. We could recognize that we are buoyed by supportive relationships around us. We ate and drank something for breakfast this morning, probably something that tasted and smelled very good, that provided sustenance and strength. We each have a stomach and organs that automatically do what is needed to keep us energized. We had the capacity to clean ourselves and to dress ourselves warmly on a cool morning. On the way to church we could see where we were going and could also notice the brilliant colors still in some of the leaves on the way. We look down and see our feet and legs that enable us to move about. We look down at our hands and should marvel that we can just think about picking up something and it happens. We have cars or bikes with which to go where we want on a great variety of roadways. There were traffic lights that helped us to travel safely this morning. As we arrived at church, we saw so many with whom we have positive relationships. We walk into a heated, lit building constructed by many who preceded us. We have at our availability a language with which to communicate. We have mouths with which to speak and ears with which we can hear. We have been given minds that can understand our experiences and try to understand the communication and situation of others. We have a belief system that can make some sense of our experiences.

We have hymn books which enable us to sing together as a congregation. We have instruments that play and choirs that sing with a beauty that inspires us. We have scripture that tells us that we are characters in a grand love story across the ages and that we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves. We've been given the opportunity to pour out our hearts unto God in prayer.

We have also been given the capacity to be aware of news from various parts of the world. I had wanted this sermon to focus on gratitude, and yet the events some 36 hours ago in Paris jolt us into reconsidering what it is that comes with this new day. Sad news of many who were killed, sad news of those who so wanted to kill that they gave up their lives for it, has brought tears and we claim it as a blessing that we have been given the capacity to mourn tragic happenings. But we also claim it as a gift that when we find ourselves angry and frightened, we have Someone to whom to turn. When we are bewildered about how to respond to such news, there is One who is ready to guide us. When we don't fully comprehend how to love our neighbors as ourselves, we've been given the finest example that shines for us. We've been given a resurrection hope that is even stronger than the capacity to kill and terrorize.

If giving is the best communication, then God has been actively communicating with us even this morning and over the last 36 hours. I have to believe that a deep and abiding love is being communicated each and every day if we will just take notice that everything we are and have comes as a gift from God. We've also been given great freedom to decide how we will use the gifts placed in our care. Sadly, some choose to tear down and destroy or even kill using their gift of freedom. We can make other choices.

What shall we render or return to the Lord for all of God's bounty to us? Our stewardship presentations over the last week called upon us to give to the Lord our W – worship, our M – mission efforts, our P –property care, and our C – our Christian formation. WMPC – Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church – we place our congregation in God's hands. We are only able to do so as individuals and families give generously of their financial means and of their time and dedication to the life and ministry of this congregation.

The short film that I talked about earlier was used as an ad for the True Move phone company. As much as Dr. Prajak Arunthong received from a kindly shopkeeper 30 years ago, we receive so much more from the loving world keeper each and every day. I hope, by God's grace, you recognize God's great bounty for your lives, and that part of your response will be a 'true move' to joyfully commit a generous portion of your financial and temporal resources to be used by God in this place. The capacity to give is in itself another great gift. Through our giving and our pledges, what will we communicate to God and to those within and beyond this place this day?

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLq_Vp5z9D4