

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

October 9, 2011

October Theme: A SEASON OF SAINTS

Today's Saints:

Teresa of Avila & Gene Robertson



Blessings

by

Larry Moffet, Senior Pastor

Blessing by Laura Story

We pray for blessings, We pray for peace
Comfort for family, protection while we sleep

We pray for healing, for prosperity

We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering

All the while, You hear each spoken need,
yet love us way too much to give us lesser things.

...What if Your blessings come through raindrops

What if Your healing comes through tears

What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near

What if my greatest disappointments or the aching of this life

Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy

And what if trials of this life—the rain, the storms, the hardest nights

Are Your mercies in disguise...

Laura Story was already well known in contemporary Christian music circles when she married her high school sweetheart. About a year later he developed health problems, and later was diagnosed with a brain tumor. After surgery and other treatments, he is making some progress.

Says Laura Story, “Martin hasn’t received complete healing—and that can be hard at times when we view God as all-powerful and all-loving.”

“The song shows that we still have more questions than answers, she says.

“We all reach a point where we have to decide if are going to choose to interpret our circumstances based on what we hold to be true about God, or whether we’re going to judge what we hold to be true about God based

on our circumstances.” Her song *Blessings* moves me, It is an affirmation of faith that emerges from our questions. It helps me remember how often something a crisis ended opening up a new door or new possibilities.

Throughout this month we are focusing on a local Saint and an historical saint as we worship. Today, I invite you to thank God for someone who helped God’s House – this building – be holy ground: **Gene Robertson**.

Gene worked as a volunteer for years making things work right around here. He was a master electrician and plumber. He could invent something that would keep the heating system working. He was a quiet, humble, creative man. In addition to his work here, he did some amazing things. He built his own computer out of spare TV parts. In World War II he was part of a team that invented radar.

So much of what we do routinely here—using a century old building for daily ministry—is possible because of Gene Robertson and lots of others, some who have gone before us and some who are with us today.

In the last years of his life, Gene accomplished all he did even though he was deaf.

Teresa of Avila is our historic saint today. She lived in Spain, a reformer in the era of the Inquisition. Things went from bad to worse: criticism and a trial resulted in illness. She said that during her illness she reached new levels of devotion to God and experienced a rich "blessing of tears."

One of her prayers became a song we sing today: *Nothing Can Trouble*.

Let nothing disturb you.?Let nothing make you afraid.?

All things are passing.?God alone never changes.?Patience gains all things.

Those who seek God will want for nothing.? God alone suffices.

In my own family, some may know this. My mother and my sisters found their life calling following a sister's illness and passing. In giving and receiving care from JoAnne, all of life became more precious.

I'm not saying God caused her illness in order for us to grow spiritually or in the case of my mother to see herself in a career as a nurse. I am saying God uses everything, even our struggles and griefs. More on that later.

Today's Gospel shows us how the first Christians struggled, too, as we do., like Laura Story, Gene Robertson, and Teresa. Almost all Bible scholars agree that the early Christians rewrote this parable of Jesus to explain a truth they were struggling to understand: when Jerusalem was destroyed, about 40 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the faith spread rapidly.

That Matthew "doctored" the original words of Jesus, we are certain: Jesus taught in parables. This is an allegory. Every sentence in this story corresponds with an historical act. Rome destroyed the city and killed religious leaders. New people became part of the faith story. As a result, we are here today.

Matthew doesn't let us off the hook. He calls all of us "newcomers" to be faithful. The Wedding Garment reminds all of us who find ourselves unexpectedly at the Great Banquet of Jesus Christ, to be grateful. Put on the garment of salvation! Some say the wedding robe is a gift the host gives each guest at the door before they go into the Great Banquet Hall.

Matthew adapts a teaching of Jesus to tell us that even in the destruction

of Jerusalem there is a blessing, and that we who receive the blessing find our ultimate meaning in the one who invites us, Jesus Christ.

Teresa said the same thing:

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.

Those who seek God will never go hungry. God alone fills us

Gene showed us that in the very ordinary things of life—heat, and light, running water, and hospitality we become participants in God's hospitality.

Laura uses her own experience to help us ask: Can we experience blessings in raindrops and healing in tears.? For her and for us, faith is open-ended, a question that finds new answers in every experience of life.

Blessings do come through the rain. God does use everything, very tear, every joy, every experience. So we can live our faith, as Paul guides us:

⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

⁶Do not worry about anything; in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸**Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for,
my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have
struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement
and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

⁶Do not worry about anything; in everything by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**

⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

***GOSPEL SCRIPTURE MATTHEW 22:1-14** Then Jesus spoke to them

again in parables. He said, ²“The kin-dom of heaven is like this:
there was a ruler who prepared a feast for the wedding of the family’s heir;

³but when the ruler sent out workers to summon the invited guests, they
wouldn’t come. ⁴The ruler sent other workers,

telling them to say to the guests, ‘I have prepared this feast for you.

My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered,

and everything is ready; come to the wedding.’

⁵But they took no notice; one went off to his farm,
another to her business, ⁶and the rest seized the workers,
attacked them brutally and killed them. . .

⁸”Then the ruler said to the workers, ‘The wedding feast is ready,
but the guests I invited don’t deserve the honor.

⁹Go out to the crossroads in the town. Invite everyone you can find.’

¹⁰The workers went out into the streets

and collected everyone they met, good and bad alike,

until the hall was filled with guests.

¹¹”The ruler, however, came in to see the company at table,

and noticed one guest who was not dressed for a wedding.

¹²’My friend,’ said the ruler, ‘why are you here without a wedding garment?’

But the guest was silent. ¹³Then the ruler said to the attendants, ‘Bind this
guest hand and foot and throw him out into the darkness, where there will be
weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴”Many are called, but few are chosen.”

**WORSHIP SERVICES: SUNDAYS 8:30 & 10:45 AM
WITH ADULT AND CHILDREN'S BIBLE CLASSES AT 9:30 AM
2723 N. 50TH ST., LINCOLN, NEBRASKA
402-466-1906**

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NUDGE:

Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There
by Leonard Sweet

E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

Brace yourself. This book is set to revolutionize your understanding of evangelism. And that revolution stands to affect not just your everyday habits, including encounters you have with other people. It will impact the very roots of your faith, the range of your mission and the limits of your freedom. Instead of "bringing people to Jesus, how about joining Jesus in what he is already doing?"
Nudge will remind you that for God to do something through us, God must be doing something in us.

p. 22 The fear that permeates religion demands that to spread, a larger fear must exist... We are sons and daughters of the living God. We are not business partners who have made a bargain to avoid some unpleasant consequences."

p. 23 The Gospel is the sensational news that eternity has already started and that the laws of sin and death need not apply to us. The Gospel is the sensational news that life, and life more abundant, is ours."

p. 28 I define evangelism as nudge and evangelists as nudgers

p. 29 God only asks that we do what we do best.- nudge. God takes it from there ...more sowing than reaping...bring people less to a decision than to an impression

p. 30 We find the Living One in the Midst of Living

p. 31 less "Look what you are doing" than "Look at what God is already doing in you"... Machado: All your words were one word: Wakeup"

p. 32 the Bible talks about living systems. it distinguishes between things coming alive and things crumbling into dust

p. 35 We often forget that Satan is an evangelist, too. ...but there are "5 God-Guarantees..." Pp. 35-36

p. 27 start small...but nudging is no small thing

p. 39 To the ears of faith we are never out of range of God's voice: ...dropping the name of Jesus is the "Nudge Bomb."

p. 55 Psalm 19, perhaps the greatest song in the Psalms, "The Heavens are telling..."

From Len Sweet: This little quiz you can find on the Web. How much attention do we give the commonplace things of life? (The average is seven).

1. On a standard traffic light, is the green on the top or bottom?
2. How many states are there in the United States of America? (Don't laugh; some people don't know.)
3. In which hand is the Statue of Liberty's torch?
4. What six colors are on the classic Campbell's soup label?
5. What two letters don't appear on the telephone dial? (No cheating by looking!)
6. What two numbers on the telephone dial don't have letters by them?
7. When you walk, does your left arm swing with your right or left leg?
8. How many matches are in a standard pack?
9. On the United States flag is the top stripe red or white?
10. What is the lowest number on the FM dial?

11. Which way does water go down the drain, counter or clockwise?
12. Which way does a “No Smoking” sign’s slash run?
13. How many channels are on a VHF TV dial?
14. Which side of a woman’s blouse are the buttons on?
15. On a New York license plate, is “New York” on the top or bottom?
16. Which way do fans rotate?
17. Whose face is on a dime?
18. How many sides does a stop sign have?
19. Do books have even-numbered pages on the right or left side?
20. How many lug nuts are on a standard car wheel?
21. How many sides are there on a standard pencil?
22. Sleepy, Happy, Sneezzy, Grumpy, Dopey, Doc. Who’s missing?
23. How many hot dog buns are in a standard package?
24. On which playing card is the card maker’s trademark?
25. On which side of a Venetian blind is the cord that adjusts the opening between the slats?

26. On the back of a \$1 bill, what is in the center?
27. There are twelve buttons on a touch-tone phone. What two symbols bear no digits?
28. How many curves are there in the standard paper clip?
29. Does a merry-go-round turn counter or clockwise?

Answers:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Bottom | 14. Left |
| 2. 50 (Please tell me you got this one!) | 15. Top |
| 3. Right | 16. Clockwise as you look at it |
| 4. Blue, red, white, yellow, black, & gold | 17. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s |
| 5. Q, Z (not true on touch-pad phone) | 18. 8 |
| 6. 1 & 0 | 19. Left |
| 7. Right | 20. 5 |
| 8. 20 | 21. 6 |
| 9. Red | 22. Bashful |
| 10. 88 | 23. 8 |
| 11. Counter (north of the equator) | 24. Ace of spades |
| 12. Toward bottom right | 25. Left |
| 13. 12 (no #1) | 26. ONE |
| | 27. *, # |
| | 28. 3 |
| | 29. Counter |

(Keep going ...)

Len Sweet's NUDGE Questions...

1. How severe is the church's "Susan Wiley Syndrome?"

Susan Wiley lived in Arcadia, California, a number of years ago. When the police found this thirteen-year-old girl, she had been confined to a room for her entire life. Her parents fed her, took good care of her, but never let her leave her room. When she was liberated, she had the intelligence and social skills of a one-year-old child.

Your lack of training and exposure to the outside world can lead to arrested development ... mentally – and spiritually.

2. There are signs and there are maps. What is the difference? Which would we rather have? Do you think we need both?

On a trip to Harbor View Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, I was told to follow the signs, but I couldn't find them, got lost, and was late. I later retraced my steps when in less of a hurry and found that they were there, I just failed to see them because of the rush I was in.

There is a vast difference between signs and maps. A map is constructed from an impossible perspective that we take for granted—the bird's-eye (now GoogleEarth-eye) view. "YOU ARE HERE" is superimposed on reality, and you "see" without seeing north, south, east, and west; what's on the other side of ridgelines, extent of land, streams, etc. In other words, with a map you see much more than you can ever see in real life. That is why they are so valuable. But it is, in reality, an artificial perspective. Not so with signs. Signs are at ground level. Signs direct rather than show. You gaze at a map to get your bearings; but signs are no good if you only stare at them. They provide the next step, a change in course, which equals movement. But they do not provide the overall picture. Simply a helpful next response to the world in which you are immersed. I think this is applicable to the church: how comfortable we can be with our maps. We unfold them, study them, perhaps even commit them to memory.

But often they fail us, for we need signs. Amos, Jeremiah, Jesus, they presented signs. We need both signs and maps. There are many signs other than road signs, and they can also be incorrect. Some people I know rarely travel by signage—they travel by site: the red barn, the big oak tree, and sometimes just heading a nose in the general direction they need to go. They usually manage to get to the destination, but the problem is that these people can't always tell others how they did it or how to do it themselves.

There are other signs: falling leaves, cold weather, dark clouds, agitated animals, and sometimes just a "feeling" that we can't explain. We shouldn't just watch for the signs but also listen for them.

3. Do you think this critique of the "church" is too severe? Not severe enough? How true is it?

Michael Jenkins, The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 39:

"Under the sign of this word "church" we have conquered. True. We have proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind; we have set free the oppressed and announced the year of the Lord's favor.

But under the sign of the word "church" we have also known our moral defeats. We have enslaved and lynched, stoked ovens of holocaust and anaesthetized our consciences with the wealth of nations."

Can the church truly be a sign of God's character?

4. Author Noel Coward was asked if he believed in God. "We've never been properly introduced," he replied. How could we give better intros to God?

5. Here is Andrew Greeley's celebration of Catholic sensibilities in the opening pages of his extended essay on the Catholic imagination: Catholics live in an enchanted world. A world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy

pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are merely hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility that inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation. The world of the Catholic is haunted by a sense that the objects, events, and persons of daily life are revelations of Grace.

Do you think Protestants in particular, are handicapped in sign-reading because a deep-seated distrust of such “paraphernalia”? What are your ways of seeing the Holy in Creation?

Interview with Len Sweet:

What provoked you to write *Nudge*?

Evangelism is a good word. If you're a disciple, you're an evangelist. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940s, is most known for his quote: “The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.” But I think his best definition may not be of the church but of evangelism:

To evangelize is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men and women come to put their faith in God through him, to accept him as their Savior and to serve him as their King in the fellowship of His church.

For first century Christians, evangelism was “We have found the Messiah, come and see.” For twenty-first century Christians, it has become “We have found ourselves, come and see” or “We have found the best church, come and join” or “We have found the best praise and worship, come and sing” or “We are following the best leader, come and fall in.”

After so much “witnessing” to things other than Christ (we witness to our own personal experiences, we witness to our denominations or leaders, etc.), I thought it was time to explore biblically and historically what it might mean to “witness” to the Christ who forgives, redeems and

sanctifies, and to do so in a way that isn't based on “Listen, Lord, for thy servant is speaking” but “Speak, Lord, for thy servant is listening.”

There are an incalculable number of books written on evangelism, what makes *Nudge* unique and different from other titles on the subject?

Evangelists used to model themselves after Lord Nelson of the Royal Navy whose strategy was, when assessing challenging situations, “No maneuvers – just go straight at ‘em”. *Nudge* evangelism is more thorough and thoughtful than that. It is based on the two forgotten premises: first, discipleship and evangelism are in many ways one and the same; two, we are always and everywhere to join Jesus in what he is already doing in the world and not rely on our own understandings and undertakings. The founder of my tribe, John Wesley, talked about three different kinds of grace: prevenient grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace. *Nudge* is the first book on evangelism of which I'm aware that embraces and embodies all three.

One of the things I appreciated about the book is its Christocentric focus. Each chapter subtitle brings Jesus into the conversation: “Hearing Jesus,” “Seeing Jesus,” “Breathing Jesus,” etc. How does *Nudge* compare and contrast to our joint-volume, *Jesus Manifesto*?

Basically it's a follow-up to our book [*Jesus Manifesto*](#) in the area of evangelism. It shows how manifestations of Jesus are the very basis of evangelism itself.

My favorite name of a church is St. Andrews. Why do I love Andrew? He doesn't have a big name like Peter, James, John, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul. But he did do one thing, and he did it over and over again: he introduced people to Jesus.

Andrew introduced his brother Simon, a fishing partner, to Jesus. And Jesus was so impressed he gave Simon a new name. When there were 5,000 of Jesus' listeners to be fed, Andrew introduced a small boy with a small lunch to Jesus. And from that introduction, Jesus fed the enormous crowd.

Andrew's contribution to the history of the church was not dramatic, or innovative, or inventive. He simply nudged people to get acquainted with Jesus, and when this happened, God did some amazing things . . . even when Andrew wasn't there.

In the short time the book has been out, what are some of the reactions you've gotten from readers so far?

It's been interesting reading. Some people are touting the book as the best thing on evangelism ever written, and others are touting it as the worst. Those in the latter category find the book reprehensible because they believe that every evangelistic encounter should be a shove, not a nudge, and that these shoves should shake the person to the core and shock them into realizing that eternity is at stake with every choice they make and that "now is the time."

I do believe that some nudging will be shoving, but not every one. Besides, Jesus was more a nudger than a shover. Even with His closest disciples, He nudged them until the shove: "Who do you say that I am?"

Imagine one of the people who is reading the book right now. What do you wish to change in his or her life – specifically and practically – after they finish it?

To be less concerned with making a good first impression themselves and to dedicate themselves to making a "Jesus impression" instead.

Nudge evangelism is based on a simple premise: in everyone you meet, leave an impression—a Jesus impression, a Jesus dent. Instead of trying to "impress" everyone with ourselves, *Nudge* shows how to leave a different impression on people—a Jesus impression. Nudge evangelism is impressing everyone you meet with the goodness, truth and beauty of Jesus.

To "nudge" is to impress on someone how special they are and how much Jesus loves them. The nudge can be as simple as a smile, as profound as a prayer, as complex as a meal, as subtle as a story, as venturesome as a witness, as ambitious as an altar call. But when you leave an impression that is more than impressionistic or imprecise, you leave a dent. You "impress" them. Too many Christians are leaving an "impress" of hate and condemnation, not of love and salvation. Jesus did not come to "condemn" but to "save" the world. In everyone you meet, leave a dent. A Jesus nudge leaves a Jesus impression that reminds people that God is up to something big in their life. Everyone you meet is a divine appointment for nudging.

The same question as above, but for churches (congregations).

Paul's pep talks to churches are less about becoming more passionate about spreading the gospel than becoming more passionately in love with Christ.

It's all about faithfulness to Christ. If you can form a community that is crazy in love with Jesus, and lives in faithful witness to that love, evangelism will organically flow from the love of Christ. For a church to nudge is to give voice and to lend a face to love.

Can you give an example of how the Holy Spirit caused you to nudge someone toward Jesus Christ?