

Last week was Halloween, and my son wanted to make sure that we watched one of his favorites on Halloween night. So after we had gone to the Blair park for our trick-or-treating, and playing on the merry-go-round for a while, we came home, ate lots of candy, and put on "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown."

I'm sure many of you are familiar with this story in which the Peanuts gang goes trick-or-treating, poor Charlie Brown only gets rocks, Lucy bobs for apples and kisses Snoopy, and Snoopy, as the WWI Flying Ace, fights in France against the Red Baron.

The main plot of this animated special revolves around Linus, and his dedication to "The Great Pumpkin." Now for those of you not familiar with the special, Linus believes in a being called the Great Pumpkin, who is sort of like a Santa Claus for Halloween.

And Linus believes, as he says, that "Each year, the Great Pumpkin rises out of the pumpkin patch that he thinks is the most sincere. He's gotta pick this one. He's got to. I don't see how a pumpkin patch can be more sincere than this one. You can look around and there's not a sign of hypocrisy. Nothing but sincerity as far as the eye can see."

Linus believes that it is sincerity, the opposite of hypocrisy, which the Great Pumpkin treasures most – and that if a pumpkin patch is the most sincere, the Great Pumpkin will visit that patch, and shower the children there with candy.

And this reminds me of our reading today from Amos.

I'll acknowledge right away that our God in Christ is not the Great Pumpkin, nor is the Great Pumpkin an actual being, but I believe that there is something that they have in common, according to Amos:

God, speaking through Amos says:

I hate all this pomp and circumstance. I don't want to see your fancy parties. I don't want to hear your songs, and your hymns, and your organ music, and your offerings of your most expensive animals. What I value, says God through Amos, is that you let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

I hear in Amos, the same call for sincerity, the same railing against hypocrisy that Linus calls for. God wants our offering to be sincere. And that offering that God wants to see is justice rolling down like a waterfall, and righteousness, right living through steadfast love for God and neighbor. God wants that sacrifice to continue in our lives like an ever-flowing stream.

How do we continue to make our lives that sort of offering? How do we sincerely use the time we have, and the talents we have, and the financial resources we have?

The church is a community that works together to live out the calling that God has placed before it: to love God and love our neighbor. We are the church together. Together we hold the faith, and we hold the faith together. We live our lives for God and one another, and remind one another of this great calling every time we gather around our computer screens, or in our parking lots or in our buildings. We hold each other accountable to our calling, to sincerely give our lives and all that we have to God's work.

The theologian Barbara K. Lundblad, says it this way:

"Can the church be a community where we help one another through the long days and nights of waiting? Can we ask each other, 'what do you need to keep going?'"

In the challenging parable that Jesus gives us today, we have young women waiting for the bridegroom to come so they can start the wedding party.

Five of the young women were foolish and five were wise. The foolish didn't bring extra oil for their lamps, but the wise brought extra. When the bridegroom came, the wise did not share their oil with the foolish, saying, if we did that we'd run out of oil.

The traditional reading of this parable is that we all need to be prepared, to be ready for when Christ comes again.

Yet as I imagine this scene, I can't help but wonder that if the foolish young women had just stayed, to welcome the bridegroom, wouldn't there have been enough light from the lamps of the wise young women who were prepared? Isn't that how light works? When half of your group has lamps still lit, isn't there still enough to see by?

It is when we rely on one another, when we share the light we have with one another (foolish and wise), when we hold each other accountable to our sincerity and faith in God, when we offer up our light and our oil – that is when we see the light of Christ making our lives brighter and full of hope, while allowing our neighbors to live with sincere hope and dignity, and enough to eat, and be safe.

The foolish young women in the parable think they don't have enough, so they run out to get some more, and miss the bridegroom. When maybe there was enough light to see by already. It's trusting that Christ will invite us to the party when we show up living in the way of justice, hope, faith, and righteousness.

The admonition to "Keep your wicks trimmed and burning," means keeping the wick short so that the fire will burn longer.

Being the church isn't about lots of show, and festivals, and parties, and burnt offerings, (burning the wick fast and bright), or even solemn assemblies. It's about doing justice and working for righteousness.

Living a life following our God in Christ is about loving our neighbors, regardless of how they voted, and how much oil they currently have. Living in Christ involves working for the benefit of one another. Perhaps one of the foolish moments for the foolish bridesmaids was thinking that they had to have their own light lit super bright, right now. Maybe if they had shared the light, they all could have seen Christ right in the middle of them.

This month we are focusing especially on Stewardship. The prophet Amos suggests that our offerings be not just a show, but sincere, like the sincerest pumpkin patch.

Jesus' parable suggests that placing our hope that Christ is coming to be among us, trusting one another, and sharing what we have is how we make our offerings last the longest.

Friends, we all have enough if we share the light we have.

We all have enough if we share the resources we have.

We all have enough when we sincerely live lives where we let God's justice roll down, and righteousness move through us like a never-ending stream.

May it indeed be so, and Amen.