



On a beautiful fall like Saturday morning of 14 Oct 2017, 11 gents were joined by Pastor Darcy for our monthly LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast. And what a wonderful breakfast it was with freshly prepared pancakes, hot from the oven sausage patties, fresh fruit, juice and our never-ending pot of joe. And as we watched the changing colors of the trees marking the beginnings of a new season, I couldn't help but notice that our gents' attire was also a mix of the seasons as there were sports shirts, t-shirts, an aloha shirt, a safari-like jacket and a flannel shirt. What a group of fashion plates!!!!

There seemed to be a bit of a pall over the group this day, and suspect some of that had to do with the failure of the local baseball team, the Washington Nationals, to win their playoff series to be eliminated again from a chance to play in the World Series. Well, at least there's the Redskins! And we all know where that leads to – more drowning of sorrows. Staying with the sports theme, there was discussion of the heydays of LCOC softball and the great teams we used to field, followed by discussions of some of those former players who still participate in age 50 and over leagues. So what is the difference you ask? Well for one, in the "olden days" the players all ran for themselves, but now they have these guys called "courtesy runners", meaning you find the youngest 50-year-old on the team to run for, uh, an older guy. Plus, in the younger years, there were the smells of freshly mowed grass and the leather of a new glove. Now, the only smells they have is of Ben Gay! How sad is that. This was followed by a discussion of "old goats". You don't have to have much of an imagination to know what group was being referred to in that discussion.

Speaking of smells of the season, it was noted that our old trusty sump pump seems to be giving up the ghost, and in failing to pump out all the accumulated water, that standing water emanates a pretty foul odor throughout the old fellowship hall, including the upstairs areas. I suppose there are two options here: (1) get a new sump pump or (2) have all those old softball players walk around the hall as Ben Gay has a much nicer smell than stagnate water. Lastly, one gent must have been overheard talking to some folks while buying a sandwich in Wegman's. He was then asked if he happened to be a minister. Our silver fox has been called a lot of things (like an Easter Bunny), but certainly not a minister. But you know, what a compliment, being thought of as a Lutheran minister and not even being Norwegian!

Pastor Darcy provided our lesson for the day. As our theme for upcoming sermons and studies at church will involve stewardship, Pastor chose one reading, **Philippians 4:10-14**, which is an acknowledgment by Paul of the Philippians' gifts and continued support of his ministry over the years, and we studied that passage as presented in three different versions of the Bible. The three sources were the *New Revised Standard Version* (NSRV), *The Message*, and the *English Standard Version* (ESV). Each of these versions recount how Paul was thankful for the outpouring of support for his ministry, during good times and bad, continuing even after he had left Macedonia, and how Paul assured these people by virtue of their generosity, God will never let these people be forgotten.

We took turns reading the scripture, and after each version we were asked to think of a word or phrase that jumps out at us, or that may hold special meaning to discuss with the group. We were to think of how do we experience joy even during tough times. We were also asked to think about the term "*accompaniment*", which is the act of accompanying someone or something, usually as a form of protection.

One point brought up was the use of the word "gift" in NSRV (**Phil 4:16-17**: *For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.*) where in *The Message* we see the term "handout" when we read "*Even when I was in Thessalonica, you helped out-and not only once, but twice. Not that I am looking for handouts, but I do want you to experience the blessing that issues from generosity*". We discussed that in general, a gift is something freely given and not usually asked for, whereas a handout is in response to a need as a result of some form of personal or organizational solicitation. But when you look at the wording in *The Message*, it is much more contemporary and it seems to work well for more youthful people to get these ancient messages across. In today's lexicon, "I ain't lookin' for no handouts" is tantamount to getting something for nothing. But in both versions, whether it is a gift or a handout, our sense was that there was no expectation for a reciprocal gift, handout or other form of repayment. The "gift" is the blessings received by the donor from God.

This blessing from God was also addressed when again we compared a more traditional passage from NSRV and ESV to one in The Message. In NSRV we read “... *but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account*”. The same passage in ESV reads: “...*but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit*”. In The Message it reads: “...*but I do want you to experience the blessing that issues from generosity*”. All three passages are saying the same thing, but again, the more contemporary version seems to get the message across a bit clearer.

We then discussed the idea of gift giving and how each of us felt whenever someone has given us a gift. As expected, there was a range of emotions offered up, such as thankful, grateful, blessed, appreciative, and maybe even embarrassed. Upon receiving a gift, do we feel an obligation to repay or return the gift in kind? Our natural inclination is to “do unto others” and seek opportunities to return that favor, trying not to upset or insult another person’s generous nature because we may feel we “owe them” for their gift. Most of us never expect anything in return, as we feel blessed to be able to offer a gift to a friend or loved one, or even a stranger, and it is in that giving that we feel God’s presence and satisfaction in our actions. That’s in line with the discussion above about experiencing the blessing that comes from our own generosity.

Lastly, we talked about “accompaniment” and how we might carry that out. Much of this discussion focused on how sometimes just our presence can do more good than any gift or present. Just having someone to talk to, to grieve with, to remember the past with or to just sit in silence and reflect or whatever challenge we are facing can mean the world to a person. We talked about how some folks have the “gift of gab” and can almost instantly become accepted by another person or group – this is a gift in a way. Then how do we use this newfound accompaniment to maybe bring someone back to church, or to join in some of our many events? For some, this is not a problem, while for others it can be a little daunting. But in the end, we agreed that just offering our own presence to someone can be a wonderful gift and open up opportunities for any number of future activities or associations.

Lots of great discussion on a simple but important topic. And no better way to end it then with the final passage from **Philippians 4:20** – “*To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen*”.

The **next LCOC Men’s Prayer Breakfast will be Saturday, 11 November 2017**. Please consider joining us as we do have a wonderful time discussing the world around us, the blessings we enjoy as part of the LCOC family, having a Scandinavian corner at MPB, sharing a wonderful meal, discussing insightful lessons, or appreciating a Navy football win over Air Force, yes all those great things that bring joy to our (or most of our) hearts! Hope to see you in November.