

Pentecost 5, Year C
July 6, 2025

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection.

So we prayed this morning in our opening collect.

This past Tuesday morning as I waited for the expected rain to arrive, I noticed the hummingbird feeder was nearly empty and took the sugarwater out to refill it. There was a wasp of some sort floating in the leftover water, struggling to be free; serves you right, that sugar was not meant for you, you have no business going after someone else's food!. I filled the feeder, went back to reading my book and then thought, "that guy was suffering and needed to get out." So in spite of my lifelong fear of being fatally stung by a waspish breed, I took a kitchen fork, removed the cover and flicked the little thing out, back into the world. I walked around for the rest of that day with a sense of goodwill and "I'm not such a rusty old curmudgeon as many might think" feeling.

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way, you fulfill the law of Christ.

As part of a recent retreat, we participants were treated to a sort of personality diagnosis: I'm sure this is not a new concept for any of you who have been sent on a getaway weekend conference, busting with activities intended to strengthen a sense of "team" in the workplace! The clinical name for the condition with which I seem to be riddled escapes me, but the result is that I am unable to objectively view those who are under my care because I allow myself to become more than a supportive bystander by taking on that person's issues as my own, standing in their shoes, so to speak. I didn't have Paul's exact words to the Galatians on the tip of my tongue – bear one another's burdens – but, isn't that my job, not only as a priest but as a Christian?

In the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done – in the words of the hymn we just sang.

This past week, in our own little community of St Thomas/Grace, the wealth of our concern for one another's welfare and health has been tapped into. And it is and should be a habit – in our community as well as in other churches, synagogues, mosques, every manner of "houses of worship," every type of community that we

extend arms of loving care to our members who, because of prayer networks, we know to be especially needing our attention. This past week, as well, we mark almost 250 years as the United States of America, the place formed of mankind's dreams where every creature on earth and in heaven – above and below, walking, swimming or flying; the rivers and all trees clapping their hands – is welcome to live and worship or not, to be whomever God intended them to be. Any day I can wake up and know that I am alive is “good,” a recovering alcoholic said to me once in response to that greeting we so often take for granted: “Good morning.” It is a good morning when those around us – members of our family, our friends, loved ones of our loved ones – are out of danger, in relatively good health; when our gardens have enough sunlight and water to produce sustenance for body and soul; when our financial difficulties are at least for the moment not overwhelming. The fullness of heart we experience in those “good” times we must celebrate and revel in, knowing that there are so many in the world – outside our own little sphere – who are suffering and in despair. Shield the joyous, one Evening Prayer warns us. Over and over again we hear in scripture the plea, “care for widows and orphans,” which is obviously not just about women who have lost their husbands and children who have no parents, but about those who do not know us, do not love us, yes, even our enemies, Jesus says. Do good things for folks who will never repay you, who don't even know you have done something for them, and don't expect a thank you! This should always be our default. One of the greatest God-given gifts we have as human beings is trying to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and I don't mean trying to fulfill expectations or live up to a hero, I mean putting on someone else's existence in order to better understand them and what they might be going through. We should consider our becoming too close and involved in other people's issues as a badge of courage, not a character flaw! So that when a man who has worked in unspeakably hot temperatures to repair your roof or a woman who sits by your bedside day and night as you lie in hospital comes running into our St Thomas & Grace house of worship asking for sanctuary, we will welcome them and protect them in this sacred place where we reach out to God in praise, thanksgiving, adoration.

*For the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,
most of all that love has found us, thanks be to God.*