

24th Sunday after Pentecost
Stewardship Sunday ~ “Always Being Made New”
November 15, 2020
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

WELCOME

On this Stewardship Sunday, we begin with a word of gratitude for all the ways you so faithfully steward your gifts here at Cross of Glory. Thanks to the musicians, lectors, tech crew, and Worship, Music, and Arts Committee who help craft and lead worship. Thanks to the prayer chain and phone tree, the circles and support groups, and all the people who so lovingly care and pray for one another. Thanks to the gardeners and lawn-mowers and Building and Grounds crew who tend to our building so it can continue to be a welcoming place for all. Thanks to the counters and our bookkeeper who so faithfully manage our finances, to our staff members and Council members who boldly lead us. Thanks to the cooks and bakers and coffee-makers who feed and fill us when we gather. Thanks to pen-pals and tutors who support local students. Thanks to all those who take part in Bible Studies, youth gatherings, and Adult Ed as we gather to wrestle with what God's word means in our daily lives. Thanks to the quilters, whose beautiful quilts we have displayed in the sanctuary this week before they're donated to CEAP where they'll keep neighbors warm as the weather gets cold. And thanks to all those who contribute financially to help make these many ministries come to life. Cross of Glory is so grateful for your care, your creativity, and your compassion as together we seek to live out God's call in our church and in our community. God is good!

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Faithful God have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We judge others before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before the needs of our neighbors. Humble us, have mercy on us, and turn us again to life in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

WORSHIP SONG

You are with me what can separate us
You are for me what can stand against us
Your love it won't let go I know it won't

I know your thoughts Your plans for me are good
I know You hold my future and my hope
Your promises never fail Your promises never fail

I am standing on every promise that You make
I will see it come to pass in Your name in Your name
Jesus I will trust every word I hear You say
I will see it come to pass in Your name in Your name

Promises Never Fail

Darkness shadows have no power over me
Fear is empty shame has no authority
Your love it won't let go I know it won't

Healing and freedom as You speak favor over me

Faith is breaking all impossibility
Your name has overcome Your name alone
Your promises never fail
Your promises never fail

Worship Team

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

SONG OF PRAISE

All Things New

1 Come Lord and tarry not.
Bring the long looked for day.
O why these years of waiting here,
These ages of decay?

Chorus 1

O come and make all things new.
Come and make all things new.
O come and make all things new.
Build up this ruined earth.
Come and make all things new.

Chorus (2x)

All things new.
All things new.

Worship Team

2 Come for Your saints await.
Daily in hope they sigh.
The Spirit and the Bride say come.
Do You not hear their cry?

3 Come for creation groans,
Impatient with our day,
Worn out with these long years of ill,
These ages of delay.

Come, Holy Spirit, now.
Our steps were faint and slow.
Our faith in you grows with belief,
Hope's lamp has brighter glow.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray . . . **God of the wilderness, you are always doing a new thing among us. Inspire in us a holy imagination to take part in it, that we might generously steward the gifts you've given us for the sake of our neighbors in need, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

READING: Isaiah 43:1-3a, 16-21

- ¹ But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
- ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
- ³ For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
- ¹⁶ Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
- ¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
- ¹⁸ Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
- ¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
- ²⁰ The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,

²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.
The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SPECIAL MUSIC

Keith Williams

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:14-30

The holy gospel according to St. Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON **Pastor Ali Tranvik**

Let’s begin with an exercise of our imaginations. Imagine you’re one of the Israelites in the passage we heard from Isaiah. It’s the sixth century BCE. Your home, Jerusalem, has been destroyed, and you’ve been exiled to the enemy territory of Babylon. You’ve lost everything: your land, your temple, your identity, your community, your trust in—even belief in—God. You’re sick of wandering and wondering what’s next. You’re tired of the wilderness and its hopelessness. **Can you imagine?**

It is into this context that God speaks: “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” Into times of devastation and upheaval, God promises to be present and to “do a new thing.” Do you see it? God asks. Do you perceive it? **Can you imagine?**

Imagination is one of the most important tasks of people of faith—especially, I think, in times of upheaval. Theologian Stephanie Paulsell goes as far as to say that “[faith] *depends* on imagination.” Because the world as it is is not yet as it should be, faith requires us to use our imaginations—that is, to see otherwise, to see alternatively, to see beyond what currently exists or what is deemed possible. Faith requires us to imagine possibilities *outside* the prescribed set of options before us. To see the “already” presence of God amidst the “not yet,” as we looked at last week.

Imagination is critical in our faith all days but perhaps especially *this* day, on Stewardship Sunday, this day when we boldly proclaim that God is doing “a thing new” among us, and we boldly put our financial commitments behind that belief. With our 2021 pledges, we

have the opportunity to imagine what God is calling us to this next year and to help it come to life. Today we come together to courageously confess that—even now, in a global pandemic—that we, our church, and our world is “Always Being Made New.” **Can you imagine?**

I invite you to continue using your imaginations as we turn to today's text from Matthew, a story often called “The Parable of the Talents.” The story is one that Jesus tells his disciples. It's about a man who was headed out on a journey so he divided his property among his slaves to manage while he was away. He gave the first slave five talents, the second slave two talents, and the third slave one talent, “each according to their abilities,” Matthew says. Now, the word “talent” didn't mean then what we mean by it now. These days we talk about someone having a talent for playing piano or catching fish, but in Jesus' time, a talent referred to an amount of money that was equivalent to roughly twenty years' worth of an ordinary person's labor (Works). So we're talking *massive* amounts of money here, “unthinkable, lottery-jackpot-sums that only the wealthiest elite might possess” (Thomas). So the first slave took his five talents and doubled his investments. The second did the same with his two talents. The third slave, however, went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. When the master returned, the first enterprising slave presented the master with a financial report: “I've doubled your wealth,” he said, handing the master not five but ten talents (aka 200 years' worth of wages—an astronomical amount of money!). The second did the same, handing over not two but four talents (aka 80 years' worth of wages, still a *massive* sum of money!). The master was thrilled. He praised them both for their financial savvy and gave them each a promotion. But the third slave came to the master and began with some bold words: “Master, I know you're a harsh man, reaping where you do not sow and gathering where you did not scatter seed, so I hid your money in the ground. Here it is, just as you gave it.” The master was furious. “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter, so you should've invested my money with the bankers so this talent could've earned some interest! Give this talent to the one whose earned ten talents. For those who have, more will be given, and those who have nothing, even the little they have will be taken away. As for you, you worthless slave, you will be thrown into the outer darkness.” And then we have that lovely line at the end that Matthew is fond of using about weeping and teeth-gnashing...the Gospel of the Lord!

This parable, often assigned on Stewardship Sunday, is one we usually associate with stewardship. As in: God has entrusted each one of us with “talents” (money yes, but we've expanded that to also mean assets, abilities, passions, strengths), and the Master rewards us when we use those talents for the sake of the kingdom. But if we “bury” them, refusing to invest them as the Master desires, we'll suffer the unpleasant consequences of the Master's displeasure (Thomas).

Now don't get me wrong, I'm certainly not opposed to using our talents for God's work in the world! But this past week as I was reflecting on this parable, and on imagination more broadly, I came across an alternative interpretation that unsettled my typical stewardship interpretation. It came from a Latino theologian, Anibal Orozco, who writes from the *campesino* (Spanish for “the farm”). Imagined from the perspective of an agrarian laborer (not unlike Jesus' own audience), this familiar parable takes on a whole new meaning, because, as Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor puts it, “how you hear a parable has a lot to do with where you are hearing it *from*.”

Now, I don't know what the “right” way to read the parable is, and frankly, I don't think there is any one “right” way. As I've mentioned in sermons past, parables are intended to stir our imaginations, so with that in mind, I want to share this alternative interpretation with you today. I'm not suggesting it's *the* right way or only way to read the parable, but it is *a* way, and one that I think opens up some new possibilities for all of us to reimagine God, ourselves, and our work in the world... Orozco (and it turns out as I kept digging, many other theologians across the world as well) begin this alternative interpretation by asking a basic question: What if the master—this wealthy landlord and slave-owner who so many Christians tend to associate with God— *doesn't* actually signify God? After all, upon closer inspection, we find that the text never indicates that the master is God. And if the master isn't God, then what if this is *not* a story about God's kingdom but about our world (Meyers)? In other words, perhaps this is not a story about how God operates but how we operate. Again, upon closer inspection, we find that the text *doesn't* begin as so many parables do, with Jesus saying “The kingdom of heaven is

like..." So what if this isn't a story about *heaven someday* but about *earth now*, a story not about the world as it *should be* but about the world as it *is*?

What if the story, in other words, is about someone who, frankly, doesn't require too much imagination for us to picture: a rich land-owner who has gained wealth through exploitative means (by "reaping where he does not sow" and "gathering where he does not scatter seeds" as our text describes). How did the rich get rich in Jesus' time, we might ask? One Christian author explains: "[The wealthy] would lend money to the farming poor at exorbitant interest. Often the people who took such loans—at rates between 60 and 200%—did so out of desperation, putting their fields up as collateral in last-ditch efforts to save their livelihoods. Inevitably, their efforts would fail. Drought would hit, or they would grow ill, or a crop would yield too little. At that point, the staggering interest rates the farmer agreed to would kick in and force foreclosure. The wealthy would [seize the land], repurpose it for profit, and the poor farmer would join the multitudes of landless day laborers who couldn't know from day to day where their bread would come from" (Thomas).

So this brings us back to our parable, to the third slave. If this is not a story about the coming kingdom of God but about the fallen world we live in, then what do we make of the third slave? Maybe he isn't wicked or lazy (which happens to be "the favorite slur of the rich toward those who don't play the game," as one theologian notes). Maybe he is defiant—courageously and creatively refusing to participate in economic practices that make "the rich richer and the poor poorer," as verse 29 says. Maybe knowing full well what it will cost him, the third slave buries his talent in the ground, hiding it from the corrupt master, literally taking it out of circulation, putting it where it will do no further harm to the poor (Thomas).

Put another way, maybe the third slave models for us the holy work of imagination. He has imagined a possibility outside of the prescribed set of options given. He has imagined the "already" amidst the "not yet." He has imagined another kind of world. A world where one's worth does not come from what they produce for the land-owner. A world in which there's no need to amass wealth because there's already more than enough to go around. A world that does not enrich the rich at the expense of the poor. A world designed not for personal profit but rather one, we might say, that brings to life the vision that Jesus lays out in the verses that immediately follow this story, verses we'll hear read next week: where the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given something to drink, the strangers are welcomed, the naked are clothed, the sick are cared for, and the prisoners are visited" (25:35). **Can you imagine that?**

Theologian Walter Brueggemann calls this kind of imagination, this kind of alternative seeing, "prophetic imagination." And he calls it "dangerous." It's dangerous because there is a cost involved. We see this play out in the parable, when the master says that the third slave will be cast out into the "outer darkness." Sounds bad, right!? But maybe the darkness isn't referring to hell, some afterlife reality for those who have been wicked, as the typical reading of the parable goes. Perhaps "the outer darkness" is the earthly reality for those who either opt out of the game or have been barred from playing it to begin with. Maybe the outer darkness refers to the edges and margins of this world where the poor, the landless, the workers, the exploited live. But maybe that's where Jesus lives too.

He seems to suggest as much in those verses that follow this parable that talk about the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned. Jesus says "Truly I tell you, whatever as you did it to the least of these you did it to *me*" (25:40). It is with those on the outer edges of the world that Jesus identifies. For it is into the outer darkness where Jesus is cast by the elite of his day, when he is crucified and killed and buried in the ground.

But Jesus also says that it's in the dark, on the edges, along the outer limits of life where we find—paradoxically—joy. Where we find true "riches," if we want to use the language of today's text. Riches that do not and cannot grow from sowing silver talents but sprouts up out of the earth, on the margins, in the outer darkness where God dwells. In the wilderness places, like we read about in Isaiah, and in dry deserts. *That's* where God makes a way. *That's* where God is doing a new thing.

So, good people of Cross of Glory, how are we called to take part in the new thing God is doing here? How are we called to steward our gifts (yes, our money, and also our time, our passions, our skills, etc.) for the sake of God's work in this place, this wonderful place that in some ways finds itself on the "edges"? In the midst of this stewardship season, in the midst of this changing neighborhood, in the midst of a changing church, what is God calling us to do? Who

is God calling us to be?

In order to get at these questions, we're going to have to use our imaginations a bit. And we're going to need some of our neighbors to help us. I know I need others to help me imagine. I'm not good at it on my own, because I often tend to think the world as it is is OK, and if things are OK, why imagine anything different? So I need to listen to those who can help see otherwise, see alternatively, see beyond the prescribed set of options before me. Like the voices of those from the *campesino*, I need to listen particularly to those on the margins—who by virtue of being on the margins have *had* to imagine differently than I. Who will we listen to? Whose voices do we as a church need to hear? Who will help us imagine and see this new thing God is doing among us?

We won't have all the answers today. And perhaps the way forward feels quite unclear. But as Isaiah proclaims, God is *already* at work. God is making a way in the wilderness. God is doing a new thing! God's love is already bringing about a new and reimagined world—and it's unfolding right here at Cross of Glory. **Can you imagine that?**

Sources:

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- Debie Thomas, "The Good Kind of Worthless," Journey with Jesus, Nov 8, 2020.
- Herzog, William. *Parables as Subversive Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).
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- Orozco, Anibal. *Siervos, Talentos, Usuras, y Resistencias* (Corporación Claretiana Norman Pérez Bello, 2015).
- Samuel Giere, "Commentary on Isaiah 43:16-21," *Working Preacher*, Apr 7, 2019.
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HYMN OF THE DAY Inspire What We Give (Sung to the tune of The Church's One Foundation #654)

O God, you call for justice, for goodness, never greed.
You seek a world of plenty where all have what we need,
where all find your abundance--Lord help us fully live,
equip us to imagine, inspire what we give.

O God, you call for kindness instead of keeping score;
You seek a world that welcomes the hungry and the poor.
Lord, where there is injustice, may we work to share bread,
Where there are neighbors wanting, may fullness be instead.

You call us to be gen'rous, for we are not our own;
We all are poor and needy; we need the grace you've shown.
May we respond to others reflecting what you give,
Abundance beyond measure, so all may gladly live!
O God, you call for justice, for goodness, never greed.
You seek a world of plenty where all have what we need,
where all find your abundance--Lord help us fully live,
equip us to imagine, inspire what we give.

CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERTORY

Thanks for continuing to support the work of Cross of Glory with your offering. Gifts can be mailed to the church (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429), or made through our new, online, easy-to-use giving site. Find the link on at the bottom of our homepage: www.crossofglory.us. We're so grateful for your continued generosity!

OFFERTORY RESPONSE #710 Let Streams of Living Justice

- 1 Let streams of living justice
flow down upon the earth;
give freedom's light to captives,
let all the poor have worth.
The hungry's hands are pleading,
the workers claim their rights,
the mourners long for laughter,
the blinded seek for sight.
Make liberty a beacon,
strike down the iron pow'r;
abolish ancient vengeance:
proclaim your people's hour.
- 2 For healing of the nations,
for peace that will not end,
for love that makes us lovers,
God grant us grace to mend.
Weave our varied gifts together;
knit our lives as they are spun;
on your loom of time enroll us
till our thread of life is run.
O great weaver of our fabric,
bind church and world in one;
dye our texture with your radiance,
light our colors with your sun.
- 3 Your city's built to music; we are the stones you seek;
your harmony is language; we are the words you speak.
Our faith we find in service, our hope in others' dreams,
our love in hand of neighbor; our homeland brightly gleams.
Inscribe our hearts with justice; your way—the path untried;
your truth—the heart of stranger; your life—the Crucified.

OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have given us the gifts of your good creation. Nourish us at the tables we find ourselves today, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a hungry world, through Jesus Christ, the bread of life. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

Just as God has called us by name, as Isaiah tells us, let us now call God by name as we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...

God of imagination, as we look to the year ahead and discern your call, stir up in us a prophetic imagination. Help us to see possibilities that are not immediately before us as we work to transform the world as it is into the world as it should be. Surround us with those whose voices, stories, and perspectives we need in order to imagine your love more fully. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who gives, you've given enough for all but still our neighbors cry out for bread. Forgive our greed, break our habits of accumulation, and embolden us to reject the ways of the world that enable the those who have much to gain more, and those who have little to grow poorer (Matt 25:29). Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of abundance, on this Stewardship Sunday, we give you thanks for all the ways that your gifts are so faithfully stewarded by the people of this congregation, for the unique gifts that members of this community share for the sake of our life together. As we make financial commitments for the year ahead, inspire in us a spirit of generosity and trust that you are at work among us doing a new thing. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of creation, you lovingly crafted the earth and all that is within it. We praise you for the abundant gifts of your creation, and ask you to guide us as we work to be attentive, imaginative, and faithful stewards of it. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of the margins, we pray today for all those who find themselves in the dark places and on the edges of this world. Be with those who are undercompensated or unemployed, those who are living in poverty, those who are incarcerated, those who have experienced sexual assault or domestic abuse, those who do not have a meal to eat tonight or a play to lay their head. Help us steward our gifts with these neighbors in mind. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of Israel, you promise your people that you'll make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isa 43:19). Be present in our loneliness, our despair, our grief, our pain, our uncertainty, and our fear. We pray especially today for all those who are sick, and for the gentleness, patience, and resilience of all those healthcare workers and care-takers who tend to them. We pray especially for Gil Hartlage, Terry Stejskal, Maynard and Marian Henjum, Mavis Wold, Vicky Jacobson, Jeannie Kuzmich, and John Thomson. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the prayers we've lifted up today and for those that remain in the silence of our hearts, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the one who lived a reimagined life and the one who is the source of our imaginations. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

Mothering God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into life. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH SONG #689 Praise and Thanksgiving

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Praise and thanksgiving, God, we would offer
for all things living, you have made good:
harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.</p> | <p>2 God, bless the labor we bring to serve you,
that with our neighbor we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling, we would work with you,
harvesting, milling for daily bread.</p> |
| <p>3 Father, providing food for your children,
by Wisdom's guiding teach us to share
one with another, so that, rejoicing
with us, all others may know your care.</p> | <p>4 Then will your blessing reach ev'ry people,
freely confessing your gracious hand.
Where you are reigning, no one will hunger;
your love sustaining showers the land.</p> |

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Love your neighbor.
Thanks be to God.

The Order of Service is from Evangelical Lutheran Worship which is commended for use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Year to Date Received: \$163,673.12

Difference: \$-4,651.89



Congratulations to Audrey and David Retrum celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary November 16th!