

Sermon Transcript

It's Just A Blessing!

**I Corinthians 12:1-11 and John 2:1-11 | Third Sunday After Epiphany |
January 19, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

Just over five years ago, I had the opportunity to go onto the streets and see, with my own eyes, neighbors who were unsheltered (SLIDE of Christine).

I met guys like Alex who slept on this bench.

We met a volunteer named Todd who stocked a mini-bus full of supplies for an organization called Walking with a Purpose (SLIDE) that we, Faith Lutheran, have provided donations ever since.

We saw our first Tiny House (SLIDE) and this sparked our imagination on how we could provide homes and community to our neighbors.

This work led to Sacred Settlements being built at Mosaic Christian Community in Saint Paul, including a house we built and paid for that went to a veteran, David (SLIDE). Here's David standing in front of the Sacred Settlement at Prince of Peace in Roseville.

Faith ultimately didn't add a Sacred Settlement, but we were pioneers and helped lay the path for this to path. Faith does significant advocacy—helping enact a law in Minnesota that gives faith communities the right to establish a Sacred Settlement.

It's not easy work to decide to put in a Settlement, but this bi-partisan law helped churches have fewer barriers to live out their mission.

This work always required conversations with neighbors and deep, intentional listening. Another community, Open Door in Maple Grove, wants to establish a 12 home Sacred Settlement in the summer of 2026.

Unfortunately, the wealthier neighborhood around the church is pushing back. The Not in My Backyard mob has grown louder and louder. They're trying to derail this work and overturn the law that was just established.

I've heard their arguments before and none of the reasons for the pushback are based in reality. There haven't been any problems at the two existing settlements—if anything, the life and presence these Settlements have brought to their communities is immeasurable.

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This past week, I got a simple request from Gabrielle, the founder of Settled (SLIDE circling Gabrielle).

She asked if we could pray for them. Pray for the community around Open Door church in Maple Grove. (SLIDE).

She also invited anyone to worship at Open Door on Tuesday before going to the Maple Grove City Hall meeting.

While taking that adventure might not be likely, the first thing we can definitely do. We might be needed in the future—our voices, our experiences, our encouragement.

Then, I got another request.

Diane Joslyn, one of our members here at Faith, works diligently with Todd at Walking with a Purpose. With her husband, Red, they've been instrumental in hosting supply drives and lately, the wax donations so they can make pillar candles.

Diane wanted to know if I'd heard the news.

(VIDEO) then (SLIDE)

Here's the thing. It's a complicated issue. Diane said, "It's hard to watch what's happening and you can understand people's frustration on both sides."

But a request came to her from Todd. Her point is, whatever you believe about these encampments, there are people living outside, right now. People need help.

Not everyone who was in that encampment got shelter. For people with few possessions, seeing the tents and equipment getting bulldozed left them with nothing. Todd has 40 people who need help.

Todd needs supplies—especially as this cold spell hits. Red and Diane will send out an ask in our Tuesday email, but tents, tarps, men's boots, blankets. We can provide funds too.

And the final request comes from me to you.

We will help Maple Grove. We will help Saint Paul. These neighborhoods aren't too far from us.

But what about our own backyard? What are we doing here?

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On March 6, the day after Ash Wednesday, Faith Lutheran is hosting an event in conjunction with Washington County to provide resources and hospitality to underserved members of our community.

Why here?

Twice a year, a church in Stillwater does it. In November, the Cottage Grove Armory hosted one of these. Hundreds of people show up. They get fed, they get connected to organizations that can help them, and they get gas cards or gift cards.

It's awesome work. It's holy work. But Forest Lake isn't close to Stillwater or Cottage Grove. People from the northern end of our county aren't likely to travel to this, but the needs are immense.

Over 40 kids in the Forest Lake School District are marked as homeless.

Kids. Whatever stereotypes we might have of homelessness don't account for the reality that people need help.

Faith, this is our chance to do what we've talking about for years. Host our community in need. That's where I need your help. (SLIDE of my info) If you've never texted me, please introduce yourself!

We need volunteers—for food, for coordinating items to give away, for reaching out to local partners. For providing hospitality and maybe even playing with or doing crafts with kids while parents are busy talking to people at the booths. A huge team from Washington County is already mobilized and making this happen. They provide the services, we just get to be welcoming. Be good hosts.

Why are we doing this?

Because this is what Christ is showing us. Relationships matter. Community matters. Showing radical hospitality is a gift that we can provide.

This miracle we heard in John's gospel—about turning water to wine—is a beloved story. But what makes it even more special is that the miracle doesn't save anyone's life, but it does help the family hosting the wedding to save face.

And that's a big cultural deal.

I loved what Matthew Skinner had to say about that in his comments on the Luther Seminary podcast this week

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VIDEO

Want to be the kind of community that Skinner is talking about? Then spend less time worrying that TikTok is banned and more time helping others.

Martin Luther King Jr had this to say: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” (SLIDE)

But did you know there’s more to the quote?

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

In our network of mutuality, what affects one, affects all. So here are three things to do this week:

Pray—for Open Door Maple Grove, pray for the humanity of those on the streets and those who advocate and search for ways to help. Pray for those who are unsheltered

Give—this week, a request will come out in the email. But think blankets, tarps,

Serve—reach out if you can help on March 6, or serve however God is steering you. What can each of us do that will stand up to injustice or to affect positive change in others or the world?

We can do this. Christ revealed his glory and his disciples believed. Christ’s glory continues to be revealed—it’s our responsibility to shine that light for the world to see.

Being a Christian isn’t a title we check off as cultural marker. Being a Christian is this (point at list). It’s not hard, but it is important.

If our world had more of THIS, imagine what a miracle that would be. Is that the world you want to live in? I have a dream... that we can do this. Amen