

1 John 4:16, 19

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. We love because he first loved us.

Who travels to Minnesota in January, with the high temperatures forecasted to be in single digits? We did, as did many of our family and friends from all corners of the US to help celebrate my mothers 90th birthday. Those that traveled distances were of all ages, ranging from 19 months to 88 years old. We had a wonderful, blessed experience as we all shared that experience together as well as us all sharing those memories of the past experiences we had with each other. There were many highlights of the weekend; too many to share. One precious highlight occurred during the Sunday morning service in the St. Paul congregation.

Many of my family were in attendance, which included individuals who are members of different denominations. All of my family in attendance were adults, including my nephew, John. John has Down Syndrome. John was asked to help collect the offering. Like many of our congregations, St. Paul typically has few children within their Sunday morning congregation. There were 2 children, probably 4 and 5 years old, who regularly attend and were there this past Sunday. Like many of our congregations, St. Paul also has an established tradition within their service. They have the open jar in the front of the sanctuary for people to deposit their change during the Disciples Generous Response. I later asked what the money was designated for and was told it was given to: Outreach International, Congregational Ministry Fund and Abolish Poverty and End Suffering.

As the offering was being collected throughout the congregation, the 4 year old boy walked amidst the congregation. He approached a person familiar to him. He spoke loudly, asking, "Can I have a dollar?" People chuckled and immediately many people in the congregation reached into their pockets. One by one, people would wave their arms in the air to catch the attention of one of the children. When the child came to them, they would hand the change they had within their hand to the child. Each time, the child would get the change and run to deposit it into the jar in front. They continued doing this, seeing random hands being raised and waved until one of the children noticed. One of the ladies had a dollar bill. She waved the dollar bill and the young boy ran to collect it. He took the dollar and went up to the front of the sanctuary. He faced the congregation and prior to depositing the dollar into the jar, he proudly exclaimed, "I have a dollar!"

There was so much joy that was shared amongst the congregation during those few moments.

Each child's excitement as they ran to various individuals to collect the offerings being extended

The acceptance of all to participate regardless of any of the 'barriers' we often create (age, special needs, financial status, religious affiliation, etc.)

The enthusiasm of numerous people in the congregation to find their loose change

The eagerness of the congregation to share their coins

Knowing the significance of each persons contribution for the programs it helps support

All shared in the ministry that came from being a part of that service. As the service continued, the following hymn was sung:

*“Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
Teach us as sister, brother each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us and bring us to believe
We are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.”*

Barb