**Gifts of Women Sunday – May 8, 2022
Look at what God has done!
written and offered by Linda S. Lotz**

**Joel asked me to provide the sermon today – and if you are like me, I can never refuse Joel. He and Rob decided I should do it, but it was Rob’s idea to tell you about how my work at ACTC has changed my life, so I will. My name is Linda Lotz, for those who do not know me, I have the honor to be the executive director of the Assistance Center of Towson Churches, ACTC for short. ACTC is a partnership of 50 churches, providing emergency assistance to neighbors in need.**

**When I look at my life, I can see how God prepared me for this time and this work.**

**I have done many things, experiences, jobs and volunteer work, which all in retrospect prepared me. I worked in technology, communications, marketing, legal, I consulted, taught, designed, wrote, and so forth, but underlying all of it was a desire to help/minister, that was not really addressed or expressed or used for the highest good.**

**God blessed this winding path.**

**God showed me that all people are all his children, and all are important. The summer before my junior year of college I felt overawed by the Baron and Baroness van Zuylen when I au paired for them, but when we sang Broadway show tunes all the way home from the ball in Deauville, I knew they were people just like me. ACTC has shown me that God loves the homeless and poor as much as any of us, and that their story is as important as any.**

**For many years, Dotsie Bregel, Leslie Strawhand, Kimberly Erickson and I would meet to pray every week. This prepared me to feel very comfortable praying with others aloud.**

**In 2006, TPC did not have a youth minister, so I led the youth to Mississippi to a summer work camp after Katrina and everything went very well. TPC youth did not sign up, but then God spoke into my heart, “I am putting together people for my purposes,” so I said Ok! And later, when there was an issue God spoke into my heart clearly “Trust Me” and so I did. I learned to trust God when things do not appear to be going as planned, and to watch to see why. In 2007,** former TPC Pastor Lindley DeGarmo **asked me to go again, so I did. While there, there was a horrible accident. I looked up to see a black Honda Accord veer across several lanes and hit the 1st van, the one my daughter Sallie was in and not only that, it bounced onto the wall and back into it a second time before coming to rest. The kids said they saw Jesus come and minister to the driver of the car before help could get there. I saw him too, and I love how they were looking for Jesus in this moment of crisis. As I was standing there for hours taking care of things, I knew why I had to go on the trip and that God was calling me into leadership, but I did not know how. And I remember thinking after we processed the whole experience together as a group, that every detail had been taken care of, so why do I worry about anything? God is with us!**

**In 2016, Tim saw the notice at TPC about a part time job opening and ACTC and encouraged me to apply – so I began my work on April 1 and a year later became the executive director. I threw myself in and tried to learn as much as I could, and went all over to worship in partner churches and meet with them, recruited volunteers, and most of all, learned how to work with those in need. I learned if I really paid attention, I could figure out how to best provide real help in a way that left a person feeling healed and whole. Compassion was useful, but when I became judgmental, I lost my sense of joy, so I learned to try to stay away from judgement.**

**Joy and laughter are really important in this work. So many come in feeling shame, despair, and I found that when we pay attention and really listen, pray when wanted, and offer our presence we witness what I call a return to self. All of you who have worked as volunteers directly with neighbors in need have seen it too. I think this is what Jesus did too in his work, he would often eat with people he wasn’t culturally supposed to eat with, and in doing so, he removed their shame, which was the first step to healing them. That’s why whenever we offer food or drink, or essential needs to those who do not have them, we do it for Jesus. All we do at the Assistance Center is minister in Jesus’ name, and the place and the volunteer work that supports it is a work of God.**

**We are there to stand in the gap, to provide the next meal, the groceries and diapers, a motel to rest, the rent to prevent eviction or help to find shelter, the payment to keep the heat on, gas or tokens to get to a doctor’s appointment, the essential needs of the prisoner who has been released, the word of encouragement that it will be ok, that God is with you, that you are loved, and that you have a place you can turn when you do not know where to go, or what to do. Prayers to calm you heart and a chance to return to yourself, to your dignity, to your essential goodness. These are the gifts of the Assistance Center.**

**Fortunately, I listened to Tim and applied. And I too returned to myself by doing this work. It was a place for all that need to help others, and use all my experiences and go deeper in my relationship with Jesus. And to learn about other ways people worship and why, and to experience that and to grow in every way. God redeemed my desire to minister and to pray and I have loved all the volunteers which is another ministry of the Assistance Center and the way in which this very special place blesses so many people including myself.**

**Bless the Lord o my soul, let all that is within me bless your holy name, from Psalm 103, became important to me. I felt if I was blessing God and full of the spirit, that it would spill out onto the volunteers and everyone would catch the spirit and the goodness. All would naturally be drawn into this relationship and come closer to God, to Jesus.**

**Staff and volunteers started the day with prayer. One day we were running late and opened the doors, and included the people who had come for help in the prayer circle. Well God showed me then and there that was what I was supposed to do, and we prayed like this up until the pandemic was declared. Some days we would hold hands, some days we would touch toes if something was going around…little did we know…. some people would come early for the prayer. These small acts of grace and respect were important to the self-worth of those we serve. We invited the pastors to come give a devotion and prayer and many did.**

**I always knew in the back of my head that I was there at ACTC to lead through some kind of disaster. I remember my first trip to the Maryland Food Bank. I asked the question, if there is a disaster, where will I get enough food? And they said, we will back you up. During the pandemic they kept their word!**

**March 12, 2020, the pandemic was declared. I polled the volunteers and we had 30 who could serve; we ordered as much food as we could from the MFB and our board voted unanimously to continue. We decided we would focus on providing food only and shut down other services as well as the phone. Over the weekend we reconfigured and opened serving our guests outside, so that we could stay safe and operational.**

**God did provide for us. We never ran out of food or had to turn a starving person away. Maryland Food Bank and all the Maryland Emergency Services agencies would meet with us weekly and they did an excellent job of getting food out and opening up all kinds of different places to get food – others came up with solutions and food was being offered all over the place. It was truly amazing and I know God was in all of this, always providing us more than enough.**

**We never closed.**

**Concerned about growing homelessness due to the impact that COVID had on work, we had the real fear of massive homelessness looming ahead. In July of 2020 I felt physically sick worrying about this, and how we could possibly help all of these who were in grave danger of losing their homes and the exposure to the virus that not being able to isolate would bring to them and really to all of us as a community. So, I asked all the community and county partners I work with most and staff to meet together. This became an ongoing conversation as we navigated through helping as many as we could as quickly as we could, by working together.**

**We designed a contactless way to apply for financial assistance and by November volunteers were taking the online applications, following up with phone calls and emails, verifying balances with the landlords, collaborating with our partners, with individuals paying what they could, paying the landlords directly to bring balances to zero. At the time, evictions were stayed, but we did not know how long before they would start. We continue to do this work – helping people stay in their homes, and referring large amounts owed to the county or city emergency rental assistance programs, which are due to run out of money this summer. So, the county must also prepare for increased homelessness when this occurs.**

**We must prepare too, and trust God to lead in what to do going forward, as we conduct our strategic review and planning. I hope to continue preventing evictions and never stop doing this work, although we may need to slow down or change how much we are able to give.**

**At some point after my crisis of worry about all the homelessness, God reminded me that I could trust that I would have what I need and that I would not see what I worried most about, and it has been so. God does want us to trust and not to worry but to do what is reasonably laid out for us to do. Just as we read in Isaiah 58, which I love so much, when we share and care and reach out it brings about wholeness in us too:**

**“**Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness [***a***](https://biblehub.com/niv/isaiah/58.htm#footnotes) will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

[**9**](http://biblehub.com/isaiah/58-9.htm)Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

**Trusting God is all important, which was reinforced during this pandemic. God has provided abundantly, and has kept us safe, and redeemed all of my desires. I remember saying I want to live to see my grandchildren, and I did, my first grandchild, Luke, was born on my birthday. That is an undeniable blessing of God. I think when you are doing something for those in need and you ask for help, God does rush in to guide you. I have known what to do, because the spirit has led and informed me, even though I have never been in this place or been tested to this degree.**

**How have I been changed by my work at the Assistance Center?**

**I have learned to look for God’s direction and timing, and to know provisions will come even when I am not sure how. That is not to say I do not plan or work hard, but if something falls through, something else will be provided.**

**Which is why I trust God in all circumstances (even though I may worry, I am human)**

**I know it is good to be who I am as I am, that I do not need to be perfect, God has redeemed my days, each experience is used for my good and for God’s glory!**

**God prepared me and made me fit for the work I am doing, so I can be bold and clear in doing what I think is right.**

**I have learned to pay attention to a person in need to get to the core of what they are asking for, and to notice, that it does not take much time at all to connect and bring a sense of wholeness and relief to a person who is in crisis, which in turn heals me too.**

**Jesus loves unconditionally and forgives every person no matter what race, background, addictions or problems – we too can be like Jesus in this way.**

**Sometimes someone will say to me, “ACTC has done such a great job,” and will remind them it is because we all do this work together; but more than that I say,**

**“Look at what God has done!”**