

Sermon, *Undeserved Favor*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels, 10.27.24

I was at a reception on Thursday evening with Bishop Scharf. He asked what my sermon will be on Sunday. I told him that I will be talking about the lesson from the prophet Jeremiah – about people returning with joy from captivity and the gratitude from undeserved favor from God – but I have a lot more living to do between now and then so we will see what happens. And then this morning, in the drive-thru line for Starbucks, I received undeserved favor. When I went up to pay, I was told the woman in front of me paid for my meal. I asked a couple of questions (to see if it was one of you all) but, as it turns out, I did not know her; a stranger felt compelled to buy me breakfast. This is a shiny example of undeserved favor – I did nothing to earn it, or deserve it, someone just gave me a gift.

This comes on the heels of an amazing Saturday with Elijah. We went kayaking with his friends from his youth group – Jackson and John, and their dad (my friend) Jimmy. We launched at Mt. Vernon and explored the mangroves near Tidy Island. ... which I have to say is not so tidy anymore. It was the first time we've been out since the hurricanes. There is debris everywhere in the mangroves. Jimmy spoke up and said: Gentlemen, I have a bag of quarters in my truck; I'll give you a quarter for every piece of garbage you bring back to the launch. At first, they were snarky – *oh gee, a quarter, really?* But, if you have been around teenage boys, they can be a little competitive. Once one of them, the youngest, started collecting plastic bags, they were off to the races! The largest piece of garbage was towed in by Jackson. It was a ten foot by five-foot section of mobile home Styrofoam roofing material. All in all, we collected over 100lbs of garbage. Elijah raised \$3.75 and Jackson and John both netted \$4. After this amazing day and experience of cleaning up some mangroves, while we were loading the kayaks into Jimmy's truck, John said, "It doesn't seem fair." I asked what he meant. He told me that their house didn't really get much damage from the storms but many of their neighbors did. And clearly, some people lost everything because we collected some of it today. He said it doesn't seem fair that we got to go kayaking while they had to fix their homes.

I thought about John's comment and replied that when we are blessed, like with not having damage, we do what we can to help others. We cleaned up the mangroves today because those with damage to their homes could not. And that is how it is with undeserved favor – we receive it and then help others with the favor we have received.

The prophet Jeremiah, in today's lesson, was speaking during a time of captivity. In history, we know that the Babylonians invaded the southern territory, called Judah, destroyed Solomon's Temple and took many of the Jewish people into captivity. Today's lesson is about preparing to go back to the promised land. God was going to show them undeserved favor and return them home, from the greatest to the least of them, God was going to bring them back. And, history shows, that happened.

I am witnessing that type of change happening in our community. Our community is repairing and restoring. It is taking people from all over to make it happen. The police who have been monitoring traffic on Gulf Drive are from Miami-Dade Count. We are receiving undeserved favor for having police from the east coast of Florida helping us on the west coast.

Saturday night, we went to our neighbor's house, Chris and Geraldine, for the annual 13th Ave Halloween Party. One of our neighbors has a property management company. She and I were talking about how quickly Longboat changed – with the destruction from back-to-back hurricanes – and, more importantly, how quickly the community is restoring. This past week, Gulf of Mexico Drive was shut down for long periods of time (long if you are waiting in line) because of the forty dump trucks that were collecting and moving household items and debris off the island. It is amazing how much work has been done in just two weeks. She was telling her clients, who wanted to get a refund and not come to the island during season, to hold on and imagine what it will look like in two months. It won't look like Longboat did before the storms, but, it will be transformed. Also, all the things you liked about Longboat are still here – the welcoming community, the beaches, dolphins, fishing, sunshine and peace; it's all still here. And some of us received undeserved favor by not having damage to our homes or this house of worship. Those who received that favor are helping to restore others. We are witnesses of this – it was foretold by Jeremiah and we are seeing it happen today.

I have a new ministry idea for you. We have some members of All Angels who have lost most of their belongings; we have some who lost everything that was on the floor, to two feet up; most of our members have not lost anything. For those who have not lost anything, I think you probably have a few extra belongings that could help another member. With that in mind, we are starting the Angels List. It's like Craigslist online where you can post items for sale and buy things for sale. We will be inviting members who live on the island or nearby to post extra belongings that another member may need. And, for members who need things, we are asking that you post what you need. Send your posts to Maria (marialove@allangelslbk.org). The site is password protected. I'll give it to you shortly through a different, non-public, medium.

This idea was first run by a couple of folks who lost most of their belongings, two feet and below. They thought it was a great idea; but they didn't want to take a handout. So, we are going to charge a small fee for each item. The money collected will go through Outreach to help a nearby mobile home park for those who lost everything. (They are doing daily hot-food feedings there and could use some cash) I ran this ministry idea by the Vestry and we are now all set to go.

For the critique of why are we helping people in our particular tax bracket when others, with lower tax (or no) brackets lost everything? The simplest way I have to answer that is by looking at Scripture. God, through undeserved favor, returned the remnant of Israel back to the promised land. It was a relatively small group of people back to a thin piece of land. The prophet Isaiah called that group, *The Light to the Nations*. From that group of people came our Lord and Savior. He said to anyone who would listen, "You are the light of the world." And, we are that light today. The purpose and plan of undeserved favor is to help a small group that then builds community and becomes light for others.

Here's another way to look at it. After Hurricane Milton, the Marshall family first repaired our home. We took down a broken gutter. We chopped up the fallen palm tree, raked the yard, made a large pile of debris, and then fixed the two sections of fence that fell down. We then went to All Angels and repaired what needed to be done and got our worship service working. Then, we helped a mobile home park near us. We didn't first go to the mobile home park. We first fixed our home, then helped some neighbors, then fixed our church, and then reached out into the

community. We are a light in this community to help others. And, we have other lights here; members who have lost many things; who need help. In order to shine brighter in our community, we first need to get our folks on the path to restoration and healing. And that is the purpose of the Angels List – to help one another so we then, with our undeserved favor, reach out in love to help others. While other churches are repairing the damage to their houses of worship, we have undeserved favor which means we are called to bring light to the community while others repair and restore. Whether it's through giving to others in need, or taking a kayak adventure to clean our waterways, or, whether it's through buying someone breakfast and showing what undeserved favor looks like, we are all called to share and to help as we have the ability.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.