

No House Elves
Preached by
Rev. Dr. Linda E. Even
United Church of Fayetteville
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For Reflection: *“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart.”*

Elizabeth Andrew

Psalm of the Day: *Psalm 135*

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; give praise, O servants of the LORD, ²you that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God. ³Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for he is gracious. ⁴For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession.

⁵For I know that the LORD is great; our Lord is above all gods. ⁶Whatever the LORD pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

Epistle Reading: *I Corinthians 12:4-11*

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Meditation

No House Elves

Rev. Dr. Linda D. Even

In the early days of our *Summer of Thanks*, I wanted us to take some time to reflect: why we are taking the time to do it; our faith's perspective on diverse gifts given to the people of God; what it means to live in community as opposed to being individual tenants in a historic building; to raise our awareness of what it takes to make the wheels go 'round in our ministry; and of course, and definitely not last, to express appreciation to all those who make things happen. Because so much of it happens behind the scenes or when we ourselves are not on the scene, it is easy to take for granted that somehow things will just get done. That is just one of the reasons I include thanks in the weekly email, and encourage others to submit thanks, because, while I may see a lot that is happening, I don't see everything.

As you have noted, each Sunday, we are thanking participants with different roles in our ministry. Accompanying those moments, we have printed the names of those folk, both in your bulletins and in the weekly email—I do hope folk are taking time to thank some of those people personally. At the end of our *Summer of Thanks*, I will provide the complete list, as provided by the different chairs and pod leaders. While there are many dedicated folk who fill more than one position, the list currently includes more than 180 slots.

I have been thinking about this for some time. Repeatedly, two comments (or rather the images used) from two different differently active people came to mind, even though they were made a number of years ago.

A few months after Al Arras became our Moderator, he commented on the education he was getting. Until he was called to this new role, he said he came to worship. As Moderator he discovered he was much like a diner in a restaurant: enjoying the meal without any idea of what went on in the kitchen. He has used that image more than once and I suspect it is one many of us might find useful at different stages in our own congregational lives.

A bit earlier than that, someone else commented positively on a task “church elves” had completed between two Sunday services. The person was being affirming; yet I took a moment to kindly redefine church elves as fellow church members.

I’d never heard of church elves. I didn’t make it to the Harry Potter themed game night. I wouldn’t have won a trivia contest unless possibly it was focused on translating Latin spells into English or classical education references. :-) but being a fan, I know about house elves. I found myself wondering if many of us sort of assume we have house elves.

I did check one thing where I wasn’t sure my memory held, but found my memory was pretty solid. So, a little about house elves and how they may or may not be like us or our fellow members.

First, house elves are essentially slaves. They must do as they are instructed by their masters or masters’ families. As long as house elves are enslaved, they are naked. Thank heaven, while I have seen many folk doing tasks around the church, they have all been decently clad. Even if it weren’t entirely antithetical to UCF’s theology, obviously we have no slaves. There are none among us who must do our bidding.

While house elves don’t have wands, they do have magical powers that allow them to carry out their tasks. I have seen a few magic shows at Talent Nights, but, in general, magic is not among our communal gifts.

In fact, looking at numerous images of house elves, I found only one thing they had in common with one another, and from which most of us may or may not diverge. Every one of them had grey hair and they all had hair. Only our hair dressers know for sure. :-)

Clearly, we have no elves, house or church. People who serve in various capacities are doing so of their own free will. They do it because they were called and feel called and are gifted for varieties of ministry. They often step up to do something they see, even if it’s not part of their “assigned” job. They have choices; have lives; are busy; just like everyone of us. Unlike elves, they can also change or leave roles of their own free will.

How do we express appreciation? There are many ways. Certainly, we can say thank you or write notes. But there are active ways.

The first is to show them respect. They could be doing other things with their gifts, time and energy, they chose this. None of them were sitting at home waiting for someone to find them a life.

A second way is to remember when we are using the building or serving in ministry, there will be no elves to put the dishes away, turn out the lights, lock the doors, pick up the trash in the parking lot. or do the not-fun-cleaning up that all of us wish we had elves to do. We need to do general housekeeping as we go along.

A third and most important way, as we thank people, is to consider all the roles as we thank people and see where our gifts and interests might fit in. Some take only a few hours a year, or a month. Some take more hours, but may also have the capacity, not only for us to develop our own skills, but to form deeper relationships with one another and our neighbors. There is only richness of faith, and relationship and strength of ministry in abandoning magical imagery and continuing to form and re-form ourselves as the body of Christ in the world.

Finally, let us thank heaven. Thank heaven that we do not have enslaved naked (maybe an extra thank you for that) elves, but rather the called and responsive servants of God, who are witness and welcoming partners for us all.

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Compassionate and ever-present God: We ask for the gift of your Spirit so that it might flow through us. We breathe in—and breathe out as in silence we wait.

We pray for a cooling balm of healing.

We breathe in—and breathe out as in silence we wait.

We pray for in—and cleansing breath of calm, of peace and hope.

We breathe in—and breathe out as in silence we wait.

We pray for a freshening wind of perspective, ideas, commitment and energy.

We breathe in—and breathe out as in silence we wait.

We pray with the silent meditations of our hearts and with the words your Son taught us to pray together:

The Lord's Prayer

**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.

**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
and lead us not into temptation,**

but deliver us from evil,

**for thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.**