

God's gift to me

Psalm 107:1-2

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. 2 Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.

When I was asked to give a testimony on how God has worked in my life it was hard for me to pin point what I should talk about, since I see his hand in my life constantly. I prayed about it and God led me to this Psalm. As I read it I realized this was my story. So, I thought I'd read it to you and share with you how it reflects God's hand in my life.

Verses 3-9

3 For he has gathered the exiles from many lands, from east and west, from north and south. 4 Some wandered in the wilderness, lost and homeless. 5 Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died. 6 "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he rescued them from their distress. 7 He led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live. 8 Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them. 9 For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

I was dying, I was hungry...not for food, but for God's love. Some of you I'm sure have heard the story of how I came to this Church, but for those of you who haven't...

In my desperate search for meaning and love I decided when I was twenty-nine years old that I was going to be the next great singing sensation! So, I dove into the idea with my usual enthusiasm. Soon, I was finding any and every opportunity to gain experience singing for an audience. I searched the papers for open mic nights and would travel great distances to sing at them. This took me away from my young children and my husband...and soon put a lot of stress on our family. Eventually, I realized that I couldn't fulfill this dream and still raise my family. So, I resigned myself to staying put at home.

Around this time my mother returned to the welcoming arms of Jesus and was fervently praying for my salvation. I must tell you I was very resistant to this idea. So, God worked his personal miracle in my life through a performance opportunity. My husband, Jeff, saw an ad in the newspaper for an audition for a local production of the Sound of Music and suggested that I try out. It was a lovely compromise...the practices would be in Ramona and it was sponsored by a Christian theater group. I did try out and was eventually cast as Maria. I have to tell you, The Sound of Music has always been my favorite movie and Julie Andrews my vocal hero. So,

it was an honor and a miracle to be given the opportunity to fill a tiny portion of her shoes.

Anyway, this experience led to my friendship with Linda Joop, who in turn gently steered me toward becoming a member of Ramona Lutheran Choir. So, in this way, as I read in Psalm 107 before, God led me to safety and satisfied my thirst.

One of the greatest gifts that the Lord has given me is this Church. It's not an institution to me...it's my family. Without it I would not have been able to weather the troubles that hit me as I grew into my faith.

Psalm 107: 10-16

10 Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom, imprisoned in iron chains of misery. 11 They rebelled against the words of God, scorning the counsel of the Most High. 12 That is why he broke them with hard labor; they fell, and no one was there to help them. 13 "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. 14 He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; he snapped their chains. 15 Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them. 16 For he broke down their prison gates of bronze; he cut apart their bars of iron.

Once again, this Psalm describes my life. I was imprisoned in iron chains of misery. I rebelled against the words of God. I made some sad and desperate choices...even while attending Church and

being a deacon. I sat in darkness and deepest gloom...of my own making. I left my husband and moved out of my home. But, God didn't let me go.

And another part of this Psalm says:

23 Some went off to sea in ships, plying the trade routes of the world.24 They, too, observed the Lord's power in action, his impressive works on the deepest seas.25 He spoke, and the winds rose, stirring up the waves.26 Their ships were tossed to the heavens and plunged again to the depths; the sailors cringed in terror.27 They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end.28 "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.29 He calmed the storm to a whisper and stilled the waves.30 What a blessing was that stillness as he brought them safely into harbor!31 Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them.32 Let them exalt him publicly before the congregation and before the leaders of the nation.

I was there, reeling from the waves as the ship of my life was tossed about. I did cry out "Lord, help!" and he saved me from my distress. He calmed the storm of my life and brought me back into the safe harbor of his love. And once again, his gift of this Church had a large part in this. It was this Church family that was my anchor in the storm. Even though my stormy life choices were pulling me away...my commitments and love for my Church kept me grounded.

Psalm 107:21-22

21 Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them. 22 Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and sing joyfully about his glorious acts.

So, when I think on how God has worked in my life, I see that a certain gift has repeatedly had a hand in his miracles. This Church! I needed a home and He led me to it. Let me praise the Lord, offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and sing joyfully about his glorious acts!

Well, we already know I sing joyfully every chance I get! But, as part of my response to his gifts in my life, I've gradually come to realize I need to support this Church, my family, with more than just my time and talents. I need to make a **sacrifice of thanksgiving**.

In the beginning I began tithing reluctantly for appearance sake. Eventually, I saw that my offering was necessary to keep this family, this home, here...where I need it. Then, I wasn't giving reluctantly, but it was sporadically. I would forget to write a check and then would be sitting up with the Choir (without my purse) and wouldn't get the opportunity to do so during the service. But, thankfully, at least for me, along came the Joyful Response program. I don't have to worry that I'm not making my sacrifice of thanksgiving. It's being

made automatically twice a month for me! Hurray! I don't have to waste envelopes, checks or pen ink, either.

But, most importantly, I am gratified to know that I am supporting this wonderful institution that I call home. And I don't want to just support it, I want to reach out to other people like me...lost, alone...searching for a home. I want to share one of the greatest gifts the Lord has given me...with everyone...this family I call Ramona Lutheran Church.