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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Pentecost 16
September 20, 2020

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, I was reading the gospel lesson for today earlier in the week.

I was reading the gospel lesson and I was thinking about this concept of generosity.

In particular, I was thinking if our society really values generosity as a trait in someone.

Our society values the appearance of a person, whether they are good looking, that's why most people on television are beautiful.

Our society values the education of a person, that's why employers want to know if we have a high school diploma or college degree when they interview us for a position.

Our society values the net worth of a person, as well as the credit score and earning potential of an individual, that's why lenders want to know these things.

But does our society value the generosity of a person?

When applying for a loan, you never hear a bank ask, "Can we get a copy of your giving statements for the past five years to your religious organization?"

You never read on a Job Application the question, "How much did you contribute to non-profits last year?"

Now, true, everyone once in a while, you will hear about some actor or actress or some other celebrity who gave such and such an amount to some organization or some cause.

But it is not as though every television personality has their generosity quotient broadcast beneath their face.

Certainly, our society does not value generosity the same way as that society that existed in the time of Jesus.

In the Roman Empire, at the time of the emperors, when Jesus walked this earth...at that time generosity was a highly prized trait.

Benefaction, as generosity was called, was something all too commonplace.

Indeed, benefaction was necessary for the daily existence.

In the Roman Empire, when Jesus walked this earth, there were two classes—people were either patrons or clients.

The vast majority of people were clients who attached themselves to a patron.

And part of the daily ritual in the Roman world was for a client to call upon their patron in the morning so as to receive a gift, in the way of food or money.

Indeed, this was the way in which the very poor in the Roman society were able to eat.

Makes us appreciate all the more the petition in our Lord's Prayer that says, "Give us this day our daily bread."

This is what many impoverished Roman citizens required of their patrons each and every day—some gift of food or money.

Benefaction, generosity, was a highly prized trait, and patrons were honored by others according to the size of their clientel.

Patrons were honored by the size of their benefaction.

And it wasn't just the handout that patrons provided to their clients who called each morning.

No, patrons also funded public works in their cities, and as such inscriptions in stone and marble would be affixed to the building or statue or road noting who it was that provided the money for the project.

Furthermore, patrons would sponsor attractions for the entertainment of the populace, whether it be the theater, gladiatorial events, or other games.

Yes, patrons provided much for the people who were part of patron's circle of clients and patrons provided much for the city in which the patron lived, and in response those patrons were honored for their generosity.

This then is the culture in which we are to hear the gospel lesson for today.

PAUSE

Yes, the gospel lesson for today is about generosity, it is about God's generosity.

We read in that lesson that the landowner provided the same daily wage to the workers regardless of whether they worked for one hour or for the entire day.

This, of course, upsets those workers who have endured the brunt of the day.

These disgruntled workers are either clamoring for more pay, or are clamoring for those who labored less to receive less pay.

Now I wonder if the response from the disgruntled workers would be any different if all those who were paid received not just the daily wage, but in fact received a golden payday, of say full retirement proportions.

Because that is really what we are talking about here.

Not retirement per se, but our heavenly retirement.

In other words, this parable may have served as Jesus' defense for his association with the likes of tax collectors and sinners.

Here were these persons in society—tax collectors and sinners—who had lived lives on their own terms, and only now later in life were these persons giving their lives over to God's will, and Jesus is accepting them, such that they may receive salvation.

But the others, the scribes, the Pharisees, etc. had devoted their entire lives to God, and those faithful persons are disgruntled.

But why should they be disgruntled?

Why would any of us be disgruntled if persons were suddenly converted, even late in life?

Wouldn't we be glad that those persons had now come to believe in God?

Maybe we think because we have been faithful to God throughout our lives that we should receive “a higher rate of pay” in the kingdom, whatever that would look like.

But the truth is what more could we want than to simply be welcomed into God’s kingdom.

In God’s kingdom there is splendor enough and then some for all people.

Are we truly afraid that somehow we will be shortchanged our due? Do we really believe God’s generosity will be any less to us, because God is generous to all?

This is unfortunately how we think in life, here and now, in our society today.

People are afraid...

People are afraid that somehow if those other people are suddenly given equal opportunities in life that somehow we are going to be shortchanged our due.

People are afraid that if equal rights are extended to all people that somehow that will infringe our my rights.

People are afraid that if equal protection under the law is given to all people that somehow that will impinge upon our protection under the law.

People are afraid that if equal pay is given to all people for equal, that that will mean less pay for us.

People are afraid because they think that equal means that less for us.

Equal does not mean less for you and me.

If anything equal means more for everyone, because it will serve the greater good of society, it will serve the greater good of humanity.

That is God’s generosity means.

In God’s kingdom there is splendor enough and then some for all people.

And that is what we are building towards, Friends.

We are building toward the kingdom of God.

And building toward the kingdom of God means first and foremost generosity.

In this regard those living in the ancient Roman Empire had it correct—generosity is to be highly prized.

Only the society back then went about it the wrong way.

Those who sought to be generous did it for their own honor and glory.

As a society, as a human race, we need to build society on the backbone of generosity, but it needs to be for the honor and glory of God.

PAUSE

Now, this past week, in one of the Daily Messages, I got talking about where we are going as a human race.

You may remember reading this Daily Message.

There was a news story about some humpback whales who got lost in the East Alligator River in Australia.

And the story was stating how these humpback whales usually know exactly where they are going.

They come to the waters around Australia to give birth to their young, because in the spring the waters in Australia are warm.

But then these same humpback whales begin to head south to Antarctica where the waters are rich with food.

And so that is the migration pattern of these amazing animals.

They know exactly where they are supposed to be going, like clockwork, only in the case of few of these humpbacks, they got disoriented somehow and ended up in the East Alligator River.

But for the most part, by the grace of God, they know exactly where they are going?

And in the Daily Message that day, I waxed on about whether we as a human race know where we are going?

Do we know where we as human race are headed or are we just carrying on carrying on?

Are we just swimming in the water, producing more young, and finding the best feeding ground for ourselves?

Or, do we have an endgame, a goal, a destination as a human race?

The humpback whales know where they are headed. Do we?

No, I am too much full of hope not to think so.

I wouldn't be in this profession if I had such a pessimistic view as to think humanity didn't have a destination.

Call me the eternal optimist, but my faith tells me that God is the creator and God is the goal of life.

We have been created by God, and we move, live, and have our being in God, and the destination of the human race is God.

And generosity, brothers and sisters in Christ...generosity is the oil that greases the wheel that drives the mechanism of salvation.

Generosity is the mortar that will bind the bricks that will build up the kingdom of God here on earth.

Generosity is what God is about and it is what we as God's people are to be about.

Generosity is the key.

Or to put it another way, to use good Lutheran terminology.

Generosity is grace.

Generosity is grace. And grace is generosity.

It was generosity on the part of God such that God created this beautiful world in which we live.

God didn't have to. God was just being abundantly generous.

And it was generosity on the part of God such that God revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ.

God didn't have to. God was just being abundantly generous.

And it was generosity on the part of God such that God redeemed this world from the powers sin and death.

God didn't have to. Say it with me, "God was just being abundantly generous."

Yes, it was generosity on the part of God such that God promised the kingdom to all; God is abundantly generous to all.

That is just how God is. God is generous.

God chooses to give more than we either can imagine or deserve.

God chooses to give, even if we are disgruntled by God's generosity at times.

But that is on us. Not on God.

God is just being generous and thanks be to God for God's generosity.

Thanks be to God, because the truth of the matter is, we are all "eleventh-hour workers" if you will.

We all receive immeasurably more than we ever truly deserve.

And all we should really then say is, "Thank you, God."

And not, "Hey, why are those people over there getting so much?"

All we should really say is, "Thank you, God."

And all we should really do is extend that generosity ourselves.

When we do, when we are generous we will be building up the kingdom.

When we are generous, we will be moving the human race in the direction it should be going.

When we are generous, we will be giving honor and glory to God, where it rightfully belongs.

Thanks be to God. Amen.