

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
A SEASON OF FAITH WORKS
Reverend John R. Hanson
September 20, 2020, 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.

INTRODUCTION

This week may lead us deeper into God's generosity and into living lives of generous grace. If we do the difficult work of forgiveness, we will find ourselves in a place of tremendous celebration and challenge. We may move beyond a simple act of forgiveness into the recognition that God seeks the best for all of us and calls us to actively seek the best for others! This generosity works itself out in how we view and treat others, in how we use and share our resources, and in how we engage in the mutual ministry we all have for bringing this message to our world.

THEME AND VERSE

Great is our God! God deserves our greatest praise! God is awesome beyond all our imagining. May each generation pass on the good news to the next and publicly celebrate God's saving action and grace!

"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last. (Mt 20:15-16)

HYMN

"I Am the Church"

***I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.***

The church is not a building. The church is not a steeple.
The church is not a resting place. The church is a people.

We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces,
All colors and all ages too from all times and places.

I count if I am ninety, or nine, or just a baby;
There's one thing I am sure about, and I don't mean maybe.

CCLI Song # 18510 CCLI License # 1713417

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION God is good. **All the time.**

GOSPEL: Matthew 20:1–16

Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing

with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he

said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So, they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first

came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?' ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION All the time.

God is good!

HYMN

"I Am the Church"

And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying;
There's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying:

***I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes, we're the church together.***

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

We gather in the name of

the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us put aside the arrogance of our moral claims and put our confidence in God's mercy.

O Lord, we count on your mercy yet expect you to punish the wicked. We serve you in faith, but when others don't, we forget the joy of doing your work. We put in our prosperity when you distribute your generosity so "unjustly." Forgive us, Lord, for the sins we know and hide in our hearts.

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Jesus Christ, the only son of our heavenly father, comes so that we might know God's mercy. He suffered and died, paying the wages of our sin. Our sins are forgiven. We have been graciously granted the privilege of believing in Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit we may live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

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

WELCOME / SHARING OF THE PEACE

CHILDREN'S SERMON *"How Will We Show Them?"*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Generous God, your majesty and glory surrounds us here. We've come to celebrate your presence and to offer songs of praise and worship. We've come to rejoice in your mighty acts and to retell the story of your goodness throughout history and in our own lives. Move among us; may your Spirit guide and inspire our thoughts and empower us to action. Amen.

READING: Philippians 1:21–30

Paul reflects on how he is united with Christ, whether he is alive or dead. But he is convinced that he must remain in his current condition (in prison) in order to keep serving God's people. He encourages his followers to continue to live in ways that reflect God's reign, even when it results in suffering.

²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. ²⁷Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that,

whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well — ³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

HYMN

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Green # 439

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry ev'rything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit; Oh, what needless pain we bear -
All because we do not carry ev'rything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged - take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness - take it to the Lord in prayer.

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SERMON - *God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. Don't lose sight of the blessing. As a matter of fact, why not try to discover it in new places!*

HYMN

“Children of the Heavenly Father”

Green # 474

Children of the heav'nly Father safely in his bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven such a refuge e'er was given.

God his own doth tend and nourish, in his holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things he spares them, in his mighty arms he bears them.

Neither life nor death shall ever from the Lord his children sever;
Unto them his grace he showeth, and their sorrows all he knoweth.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OFFERING PRAYER

It is mystery beyond us, Jesus, that our clumsy attempts at goodness or our frail and faltering labors could make a contribution to your saving work in our world. Yet, you bless us by inviting us into your service, assuring us that what we do does matter. And then you add the gifts of joy, fulfilment, and creativity and your own support and care. You are gracious and we are grateful for your love. Restore to us the joy of simple, faithful service, and teach us to leave the results to you. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

HOLY COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Our souls praise you, Lord. Your love is so generous it cannot be diluted, and it will never run dry. Your favor is for all who receive you, and your blessings are for us to share and not to control. Our souls praise you, Lord, thank you for the gift of life we receive in this meal of forgiveness. Amen.

HYMN

“God Be with You”

Burgundy # 157

God be with you till we meet again; by his counsels guide, uphold you,
With his sheep securely fold you; God be with you till we meet again.

*Till we meet, till we meet, till we meet at Jesus' feet;
Till we meet, till we meet, God be with you till we meet again.*

God be with you till we meet again; 'Neath his wings securely hide you,
Daily manna still provide you; God be with you till we meet again.

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BLESSING

May the blessing of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit surround you and sustain you in the coming days.

Amen!

Go out from here as workers in God's upside-down kingdom, where the last are first and the first are last, where needs are met in miraculous ways, and there is grace enough for all!

We go as Pentecost people, proclaiming Jesus Christ to mend a broken world.

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Worship, as an action, continues to change.

Use this space to guide your thoughts as the Spirit may lead you.

Use this time to center your distractions in order to help activate your worship.

The central theme, that flows through all of these readings is simple – God is compassionate and merciful, generous and forgiving. This is a fitting response to last week’s focus on forgiveness, because we must recognize, if we are to take Christ’s message seriously, that God seeks the best for people, and that God encourages us to do the same – which takes us beyond just forgiveness into a life of seeking the blessing of others.

Jesus’ parable demonstrates God’s generosity and challenges us not to resent generosity shown to others, but to rejoice in it. Paul is a living example of this since, though he expressed his desire to come to his life’s end and go to be with Christ, he was willing to continue to suffer and serve for the sake of the church which he had founded in Philippi. And, Jonah is a mirror for us showing how bitter we can easily become when God shows mercy and generosity to others, and how easily we become ungrateful for what we have enjoyed, especially when we fall into a feeling of entitlement.

The challenge of this week, then, is to learn to appreciate what we have received from our generous God, and, while celebrating God’s generosity to others. This applies to God’s mercy and forgiveness and the welcome God gives to all people to share in God’s reign.

It is disturbing the way in which God’s generosity has been defined in many of our churches today. In a rather Old Testament view of things, we have made “health, wealth and happiness” equal to “God’s blessing,” and “sickness, poverty and suffering” to be a sign of “God’s curse.” Jesus consistently challenged this view in his day, and as Christ’s followers we need to as well. This means we need to change both our understanding of God’s generosity and our practices of giving, sharing and celebrating.

First, we must recognize that those who are “blessed” receive blessing not for themselves, but for all - so they can share it. Neither wealth nor poverty are signs of God’s approval or lack thereof. They are simply realities of the world and of life. But they are also an opportunity to express the principles of grace and generosity that characterize God’s reign in us and our world.

Second, we need to move from our individualistic view of the world, to a more community-oriented one. There are always people, in any community or family, who are effective at accumulating an abundant livelihood, and the responsibility is on them to share and support those who do important and necessary work for a healthier society (or for those who are unable to work for whatever legitimate reason). In this way we become a source of God’s generosity to one another.

But it also goes further than the practicalities of economic realities. God’s generosity is also extended to include all people, even those who may appear, in our idea of “fairness” not to deserve it. This means that as we encounter those who work differently, live differently, believe differently, and behave differently... we are called, from a position of judgement, to a position of generosity and kindness.

If we can be generous with grace, with forgiveness, with seeking the best for others, and with welcoming all people into God’s community, we will find that we, almost automatically, begin to be generous with other things, including our wealth. And through our generosity, God’s generosity is manifest in our communities and our world.

Devotion resources from John van de Laar at Sacredise.com