

Devotions – August 26 – September 1, 2018

By Pastor Andrea Fluegel

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Sunday, August 26, 2018

Text: Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Jesus talked about money all of the time. In fact, the Bible references money and possessions more than 2,350 times. It’s more than Jesus talked about love and more than He talked about heaven and hell combined. So why is money talked about so much, when in our homes and churches, money has become a forbidden subject?

Money and material possessions pull us away from God. We worry that we don’t have enough money or “stuff,” and we end up basing our own value and worth--and the value and worth of others--on how much money and stuff we have. When we spend time focusing on the lack of worth or value, as well as the fear that scarcity brings, we lose sight of God’s provision and abundance. We also lose sight of a fundamental truth: that God through Jesus gives life and gives it abundantly. Our worth and our value, as baptized children of God, comes from God because God has uniquely created and made us. Jesus reminds us constantly of these things. He wants us to love God, trust in God, and have confidence that our worth comes from Him and Him alone.

Prayer: Lord of all, thank you for giving us life and giving it to us abundantly. Thank you for naming and claiming us as your children. Help us to know that our value and worth come from you and you alone rather than from our material possessions or achievements. Guide us in sharing your love and grace with others with open hearts. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Monday, August 27, 2018

Text: 1 Chronicles 29:14-19

¹⁴ “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ¹⁵ For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. ¹⁶ O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. ¹⁷ I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. ¹⁸ O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. ¹⁹ Grant to my son Solomon that with single mind he may keep your commandments, your decrees, and your statutes, performing all of them, and that he may build the temple for which I have made provision.”

Over the years, I have learned that generosity isn't just giving someone a toy to use or money to borrow. Generosity is a spiritual practice just like praying, reading your Bible, feeding the hungry, and fully participating in worship.

Actually, generosity is one of the most difficult of all spiritual practices, because in order to practice generosity, we have to trust in God completely. We also have to realize that ALL that we have belongs to God. Our money, our houses, our cars, our boats, all our toys belong to God. We, as children of God, are then entrusted with God's creation and resources to be able to help transform the world in Jesus' name. Also, we have to understand that some of the things, not all of the things, that God gives to us is for our own personal enjoyment and Sabbath, so that we have the energy and the passion to go out into the world in order to be generous, to love our neighbors, those not like us, as ourselves.

Prayer: Generous Lord, we struggle to trust completely in you. We need your help to be people who live out generosity every day in our lives so that we can fully live into your calling for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Tuesday, August 28, 2018

Text: Mark 12:42-44

⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out

of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Mark Allen Powell, a Lutheran Bible scholar and theologian, in his book, *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life* writes, “We are invited to put money in the offering plate on Sunday morning because we want and need to give it. We have a spiritual need to worship God, and through our offerings we are able to express our love and devotion for God in a way that is simple and sincere. The motivation of the giver is what counts most, not the size of the gift or degree of benefit to the recipient.” (page 12).

Generosity is not about giving our money away or lending someone our money or stuff. Being generous is about being warmhearted, having an open spirit, of putting others before ourselves. Often we feel that when we are generous, we are sacrificing what we have for someone else and we worry if it is the right thing and if we will have enough for ourselves at a later point in time. Generosity is not a sacrifice. It is faithful, Biblical living by having an open and trustful heart toward God and toward other people.

Prayer: Compassionate Lord, get us unstuck from always feeling as if the other shoe is going to drop. Remove the worry that fills our hearts and instead help us to fill it with an open spirit of your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Wednesday, August 29, 2018

Text: Psalm 104:24-31

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!

**In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.**

**²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.**

**²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.**

**²⁷ These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;**

**²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.**

**²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.**

**³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.**

**³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works.**

In Martin Luther's Small Catechism, he explains the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us today our daily bread." "What is this?" Luther asks? The answer he says, "In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God causes us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving." What then does "daily bread" mean? Answer: Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors and the like.

God gives because God loves. God loves us so much that God continually and abundantly provides for our daily needs through creation, other people, employment, business, government, non-profit organizations and our congregation. However, most of the time, we believe that all that we have is ours and of our own making. Yet, when we live a life of gratitude and grace toward God and others, we begin to proclaim the Psalmist's words, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works."

Paul Tournier puts it this way: "There comes a day when we understand that all is grace, that the whole world is a gift of God, a completely generous gift. We see each flower, each drop of water, each minute of our life as a gift of God. He gives them all, both to those who know him and to those who are ignorant of him" (*The Meaning of Gifts*, page 59).

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank you for loving us so much. Thank you for each flower, each drop of water, for each minute of our life. Let us today proclaim your good news of gratitude and grace: May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Thursday, August 30, 2018

Text: Psalm 116:12-19

**¹² What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?**

**¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,**

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the LORD

in the presence of all his people.
¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.
¹⁶ O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.
¹⁷ I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call on the name of the LORD.
¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

It is difficult to be grateful and to focus on the love of Jesus when we are consumed with worry, grief, fear and anger. It's also difficult to be generous when we are waiting for the other shoe to always drop. Joyce Rupp, an author, co-director of "The Institute of Compassionate Presence," a member of the Servite Order, and a volunteer for hospice, says that when the hardships of life surround her, she focuses on the little things around her such as the sounds of birds, the movement of the blades of grass, the smell of flowers. It helps her to reawaken her sense of gratitude knowing that God is present in all things. By noticing God's daily provision and giving thanks, our hearts are once again opened to the abundance of God's love and grace.

"Andrew Harvey writes in *The Way of Passion* that if we were really looking at this world, we would be moved a hundred times a day by the flowers at the side of the road, the people we meet, by all that brings us messages of our own goodness and the goodness of all things. To be grateful is to affirm goodness wherever we find it. The problem with being grateful is not the lack of countless blessings; the problem is with being inattentive and unaware of these blessings" (*The Cup of Our Life: A Guide to Spiritual Growth* by Joyce Rupp, page 130).

Prayer: O Lord, reawaken our sense of gratitude. Breathe new life in us and open our hearts once again to your abundance of love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Friday, August 31, 2018

Text: Acts 2:41-47 (NRSV)

⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the

proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This passage in Acts is often misunderstood. It takes place just after Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to be with all believers. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit breathes new life into the world, gifting people with passions and talents, and places specific callings on people's hearts. These gifts are then used to share the love and grace of Jesus and to transform the world. Following this, the believers of Jesus as Savior, gathered together for prayer, worship, fellowship, communion and service. Also, when they sold their possessions, they gave some or all of the proceeds to the community of believers. They kept what they needed to provide for their daily necessities. The rest of the profit from sale of their home (of course they bought a new home too), and other material possessions went to help the community share the Good News of Jesus and to provide for those who had need, such as widows, orphans, and refugees.

This is one way in which the early Church proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. They strongly believed that by sharing the abundance of God with others so that there would not be a needy one among them, they would be living out Jesus' love in this world. For example, a church potluck is more than just gathering together for fellowship, food, and fun. A potluck is also about feeding those in need among us. Individuals and families bring to the table what they have – a hot dish, a pan of brownies, a Jell-O Salad, a gallon of milk. And for those who have very limited means, they are able to just show-up and eat their fill. No questions asked, no words exchanged. People gathered together with grace, with gratitude, and with generous hearts.

Prayer: Lord of mercy, your sacrifice on the Cross was for the entire world. We confess that we often forget that we are gathered together as your Body for the sake of the entire world. Help us to proclaim your love and to work for justice and mercy for all people. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Saturday, September 1, 2018

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the

will of God also to us. ⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Mark Allen Powell, a Lutheran Bible scholar and theologian, in his book, *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life* writes, “Being faithful in stewardship means putting our faith into action. We believe that all we are and all we have belongs to God and we believe that this is good news” (page 43). Being a faithful steward of God’s abundant provisions doesn’t mean that we are the biggest donor to church or to other charities. Being a faithful steward means that when it comes to our time, possessions, money, and talents that we trust in God first and acknowledge that all we have comes from God. Being a faithful steward is about an attitude of the heart and being grateful to be a part of God’s entire creation. When we are generous (money and attitude) we become joy-filled people living a faithful life that God intended for us. Living faithfully means acting on our faith in Jesus that tells us that we belong to God.

Prayer: O Lord, help us be faithful stewards of all that belongs to you and to trust you first in all things. Help us to know that generosity is not just about money but that it is also an attitude of the heart. Let us be joy-filled people, acting always on our faith in Jesus. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

