

..... Daily Devotions

November 18-24, 2018

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Sunday, November 18, 2018

Scripture: James 1:17

“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...”

My daughter is in 6th grade. I can't believe it! Anyway, we were sitting in the living room doing not much of anything and she made the comment, “Everything at church is free, right?” My husband said, “Yes...” in a way that was asking “*What is your real question?*” Then she asked her real question... “Then how does the church pay for things?” It was a really good question. We answered her saying something about how God has been so generous and good to us. God has given us the very breath we breathe. And in response to that, we give to God's mission...and so do the others who gather for worship. We talked about how we give our monthly offering in worship and we showed her our offering envelopes. It was a really great impromptu family stewardship conversation.

I used to think that people didn't want to talk about money or giving their money, but I've discovered that most people want to give their money to impact our community and our world. Most people desire to be part of something bigger than themselves for God's glory. I am constantly impressed by peoples' generosity and outward focus.

God's grace is free. Jesus' love was poured out on the cross in love for you and for the world. And that pull we feel to spread God's love comes from the Holy Spirit who lives in you and in me. As we look ahead to Thanksgiving, it's a great time to think about being generous in our giving of our money for the glory of God because every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above. How are you giving in response to all that God has given you?

Let us pray: *Father of lights, as the darkness increases this winter, remind us that you are the light of the world. Remind us that you are a generous giver and you will continue to give us everything that we need. May your Spirit empower us to be generous givers so that others may see your goodness. Amen.*



Monday, November 19, 2018

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:5

“...they gave themselves first to the Lord...”

This time of year we have a Confirmation Banquet with the Confirmands, their families, and their prayer partners. We set the table up in the shape of a cross and at the head we use a fancy throne-like chair. (*The one that used to be behind the pulpit for the pastor to sit in but we don't use it that way anymore and so it is a chair that is stored most of the year.*) Before the banquet, a third grader was in the room for a game and she asked me, "Who gets to sit in **THAT** chair?" I answered, "Jesus." She put her hands on her hips and said, "**WHAT!**!?! Why does **HE** get the good chair?"

I love the honesty of kids! I think she was asking the very question that all humans ask in one way or another... "Why worship God?" Maybe you can think of a time that you may have felt like that? Why does Jesus get the special chair at our table and a special place in our lives?

The people of Macedonia "gave themselves first to the Lord." Even in their affliction and their poverty they "begged" for the "privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints." When we live lives in worship of God we are transformed by God's Word and by our community of faith.

Part of the idea behind weekly worship is that it's one hour in the week where we don't put ourselves first. It's one hour in the week where we remember that the Maker and Owner of the Universe holds the seat of honor in our lives. When we worship and give God glory, we are reminded that the Maker and the Owner of the Universe knows us by name, hears our prayers and our pains, and loves us just as we are—while leading us more fully into who we were created to be.

If we are always seeking the fancy chair in the room, we overlook the opportunity to give ourselves first to the Lord. But when we sit confidently in the promise of our baptism... the promise that we are Children of God... the promise that we already have a place of honor at the table. When we sit confidently in the promise of our baptism, we are able to cling to God rather than the things of this world like money, stuff, and self-centeredness.

May you carve out one hour this week for communal worship. And when that hour is over, may you remember that worship doesn't end when the hour is up but instead, that one hour leads us to a week full of worship, a life full of service, and a community that leans on Christ.

Let us pray: *Jesus, help me to give of myself first to you today and every day. Amen.*



Tuesday, November 20, 2018

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:9

"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."

A couple weeks ago I was helping at my daughter's school fund raiser. I got to run around and dance and cheer them on in the Hodag costume (our town's mascot). It was really fun (and

tiring). When I went out to the car with my daughter to leave—my car battery had died. DIED. My husband was out of town and I found myself wondering what I was going to do. Before panic set in and before I lost my cool, I thought of somebody who might help me. A man from church who probably had jumper cables and if it was possible... he would come. I called, and he was 3 minutes away. I was driving my car to the mechanic within minutes.

Paul is talking about Jesus' generous act on the cross. The very reality that our God put on skin and came to earth to end separation between Creator and Created. So, in what ways has Jesus made us rich? Clearly, Paul is not talking about monetary riches. If that was the case, I would expect a car that didn't die in the parking lot. There are plenty of preachers and theologies that tell us that if we have favor with God, money will fall into our lap. But that is NOT what Paul is talking about and it's NOT who Jesus is.

As a "missionary" in Tijuana (when I was 21) I was working with Amor Ministries and building homes. I knew just enough Spanish to be entertaining and there was a 7-year old boy who knew just enough English to help me out. We played together while his house was being built. On Thursday night his mom wanted me to come over. Her current home was more like sheets hanging from a string, but she wanted me to come over, so I agreed. This little boy put on his best clothes and she washed his hair for my arrival. Then she fed me. I was scared to eat for fear I might get sick, but I was more afraid of being offensive and so I ate her food and drank her water. We barely understood each other. But then she insisted I sit near her and she stood up to put her hands on my head and she gave me a blessing. The words were lost on me, but the power of the Holy Spirit was felt between us. This was a woman of faith. A woman with nothing to share and yet was willing to share EVERYTHING she had. Paul isn't talking about wealth... because this woman was rich in faith in spite of her poverty.

Jesus makes us rich in FELLOWSHIP. Our fellowship with each other and our fellowship with God. We were designed to live in community with one another. To show up for each other when somebody needs help. To share our food and our faith stories. To offer prayers and blessings to one another. And to share friendship and time together. We are rich in our fellowship with God. God put on skin at that first Christmas because God didn't want to be distant and far away. God's desire has always been to have a close relationship with his people. When we realize how rich we are, we are far more willing to give everything we have for the Glory of God.

Let us pray: *Lord, you give us all we have and you didn't even spare your Son. May we share the fellowship we have with you so that others may be drawn into a relationship with you and your people. Amen.*



Wednesday, November 21, 2018

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6

“The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

Soon we will celebrate Thanksgiving. There will be an abundance of food eaten at tables all over the USA. People will give thanks for family and friends, work and rest...

Paul uses an image of a farmer for this reading. Farmers today usually plant in orderly rows and have a strategy to get the most out of each seed that is planted. But a first century farmer would carry a large satchel (like a giant bag for a newspaper route) and throw seeds all around. The more you throw out the more likely your crop will be prosperous. By the handful. Instead of one at a time... plunk, plunk, plunk... it's more like 100 at a time making a sound like when you spill a bag of skittles.

God's grace is like a farmer in the first century. God doesn't hand out one per person... God throws grace around like he's ripping open a bag of skittles too fast and they all pour out all over the place. God is simply hoping everybody gets to taste the rainbow. Grace is getting thrown around by the 100s and the 1000s to the world. God's grace doesn't run out and isn't rationed. What a blessing to be on the receiving end of such a generous God.

We are given grace upon grace. And we respond the same way. We give ourselves and our money for God's glory is to be joyful and generous. We reflect the generous God that loves us and loves the world. May you see those in need and respond joyfully, generously, and with an abundance of grace.

Let us pray: *Thank you for loving me. Thank you for showering us all with your grace. Open my heart and my life to reflect your generosity. Amen.*



Thursday, November 22, 2018

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:11-12

“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.”

Happy Thanksgiving!

When I was newly ordained and in my first call, I was a little overwhelmed to think about how I might give financially. My seminary student loan debt seemed like a life sentence and I didn't even have the basics—like furniture (*we asked our congregation to give us stuff they had laying around and so our furniture was kind of like we had been at every garage sale in town... but we were grateful to have it!*)

The Assistant to the Bishop took me to lunch and so I asked if there was some “right” amount because I was looking for help. I will never forget his response to me. He said, “Well... you need to give until it feels good.” Give until it feels GOOD!?! I had expected “Give until it hurts.” But he said something completely different. We give freely and joyfully to our God. We give, not out of obligation but out of thanksgiving. We give... until it feels good.

Today is a day that we eat and we enjoy a day with family. And we remember that we have been given the greatest gift in history... the gift of Jesus Christ. This gift comes with the promise that no matter where we go or where we find ourselves... Jesus is with us. Even in death we receive the promise of life with him. Today, we give thanks first, for our risen Savior.

May we live in the promise of our baptism and may we respond outwardly in love toward God and toward our neighbor... even the ones we don't like. And may we give until it feels good!

Let us pray: *Thank you, God, for sending your Son. May we be filled with gratitude for a life with you. Amen.*



Friday, November 23, 2018

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

“We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”

My daughter is in 6th grade and she went to rake leaves with a group from our congregation. I wasn't able to go with them because I had a conference meeting in Minocqua with our bishop and conference. When she called me to tell me about it she was really excited! She had had so much fun and she was full of stories of people falling, doughnuts, and joking around. Then she said, “Leaves are a lot heavier than I thought.”

One leaf... even 20 leaves hardly add any weight to what you are carrying. BUT, when you blow leaves from many acres together and put them on a tarp and carry them to the back of the truck to haul away... they're pretty heavy.

Faith is like that. People show up in worship at times of tension and transition in hopes that they will find something there but sometimes walk away feeling like it “didn't do anything.” It is true. One worship experience here or there can feel like it doesn't add much to what you're carrying. Faith is cumulative. It adds to your life a tiny bit at a time. The more people worship together, the more they notice the impact it's having on their life. It takes a little while to notice the weight. Or maybe it would be better to say that it takes a little while to realize that God is lifting the weight of your burdens off you. Either way, its gradual and cumulative.

I started working out a few months ago and I'm just starting to notice that I have stronger muscles. They didn't just pop up after my first 20-minute work-out. But I did notice an increase in energy within the first month. Worship is like that too. There may be an immediate energy that comes. And then, with time comes spiritual maturity and depth. We build relationships with those sitting next to us and we let our guard down which allows them to walk beside us. God transforms us... one leaf at a time.

Hang in there. Don't give up on your worship life. We all have dry spells... that's why God gives us each other.

Let us pray. God, I give you thanks for walking along side of us and for giving us a community to walk with. Lord, help us to include and invite others to walk in community and to know you more. Give us patience and time so that you can grow us, shape us and empower us as disciples of Christ. Amen.



Saturday, November 24, 2018

Scripture: Matthew 1:23

An angel announces the birth of Jesus Christ: **“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God with us.’)”**

Last night my daughter said her throat hurt and I said, “Ok. We’ll keep an eye on it. Good night.” And then at 2am she woke up hysterical (so hysterical that I thought she fell out of her bunk bed.) I guess her throat hurting was more urgent. I was exhausted and after my husband got her salt water to gargle with, she called for another blanket because she was cold. I took her temperature and it was 101.7 so I knew she didn’t have “fake-itis.” I tried to go back to sleep but I could hear her quiet sobbing on the couch and I knew there was nothing I could do until the morning when I could take her to the doctor. Strep throat is going around and her symptoms seemed textbook. But between now and the morning felt like forever. She was awake, crying and shivering for over an hour and I couldn’t sleep because my heart was breaking (partly because I’m sadly aware that a kiss and hug from me isn’t enough these days—middle school changes things.)

So, I went to the couch and I sat at her feet and crawled under the blanket with her. She fell asleep within a few minutes. Life is full of things that we can’t fix. People I love deeply in my congregation who have cancer and become weak and frail while they fight with all their might for their life. There isn’t anything I can do to fix it. Or somebody who loses a spouse or a child... the suffering is their own and there isn’t anything I can do to fix it or make the pain go away. And so in those times, we need to sit at their feet, share some comfort together, and remember that we not only have each other but we have a God who put on skin because God has never cared for long distance relationships. God is going to crawl under the blanket with us.

The greatest gift we can give one another is the gift of our presence. Because the greatest gift Jesus continues to give us... is the gift of his.

Let us pray. *God of Comfort, you long to be close to us. Remind us of your presence. Remind us that you are as close as the air we breathe. And may we show up for one another to sit in the midst of the pain in this world. Amen.*

