

Matthew 5:1-12 Nov. 13, 2011 (OSL Church, Hermosa, SD)

Generous People of God

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Luke 12:34

It is in giving that we find thanks and it is in thanks that we give. What is God calling you to give? What is your story of generous giving and living?

If I asked you to make a list of your blessings and wants, I’m guessing that if you were honest, your lists would not include what is in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12:

I want to be someone who is poor in spirit, someone who mourns, who is meek, one who hungers, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, one who is persecuted for righteousness’ sake; someone who’s reviled, persecuted, that others utter evil intents about. . .

If I was honest with you, and I was working on my list only out of my own selfish desires, I wouldn’t have them on my list either.

Okay, maybe there are a couple that sound pretty good – merciful, pure in heart, peacemaker. . . but listed w/all of the others, they don’t seem to fall under the title of wants or blessings. So how can Jesus call someone “blessed” who is connected with such unpleasant things? [“How can blessedness be associated with such unpleasant things?” (Prof. Clayton Schmit, Fuller Seminary, CA)]

Isn’t this just like Jesus, though? Jesus turns things upside down again and forces us to wake up as to who we are as followers of him. Jesus calls us to set aside our own selfish wants and desires and rewrites our lists for us. This list that Jesus gives is not a list of lofty claims, but is created in the very moment of Jesus’ declaration. The only way our lists can turn into something other than what we want is through the very blessing of the gift God gave to us in Christ.

This list isn’t only a picture of the future kingdom of God, but also a reflection of the kingdom of God here and now among us. It’s like last week – it was All Saints Sunday, a day not only where we remember and celebrate the saints that have gone before us, but we also think of those living saints who show us that the kingdom of God is in our midst. What is a saint? It is not some special class of Christian, but includes all of the followers of Christ. It’s also like a day where we celebrate God’s generosity for us by prayerfully considering how we can give a percentage of what we have for God’s work. Jesus’ generosity is lived through us – the living saints. And we, as forgiven saints of God, can only live our lives out loud through God’s generosity.

What does it look like to live our lives out loud as generous givers of God? That is what we celebrate together – God’s generosity for you and your generosity to others.

Story: The celebration of Holy Communion at the installation service of Bishop Niywe in Cameroon (Pastor Trisha Boese – outside; woman clapping her hands. Me – balcony; passing group of boys – 1st reaction and 2nd reaction; wondering if people would bypass. . .)

Story: The celebration of offering in a Lutheran congregation in Cameroon – Christ the King Sunday and Harvest Festival

How do these 2 acts fit together? Both involve the generosity of a big God who celebrates a Godly love for us in the giving of his Son, Christ. One is God reaching out to us in generosity. The other is how we reach out to others through the freedom of God’s gift in generosity to others.

And yet, we don’t give generously to get anything back. Stewardship, financial giving, is NOT the reversal of a country song where you get your wife back, your dog, your money, your job. . . that’s NOT the way it works. We give out of the celebration of what God has done for us, with us, and through us!

Remember the example at the beginning about making a list of blessings and a list of wants? I’m guessing that if we wrote down our list of blessings in our lives right now, we might be surprised by how that list fills up. And our list of wants? That list might look a bit different as well!

Let us pray. “O gracious God, who so generously lavishes our lives with goodness, create in our hearts a deep center of gratitude, a center that grows so strong in its thanksgiving that sharing freely of our treasures becomes the norm and the pattern of our existence. Remind us often of how much you cherish us, of how abundantly you have offered gifts to us, especially in the hours of our greatest need. May we always be grateful for your reaching into our lives with surprises of joy, growth, and unearned love. Amen (prayer – *Fresh Bread and Other Gifts of Spiritual Nourishment*, Joyce Rupp)