

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

June 27, 2021

Psalm 30:1–12 (ESV):

1 I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

2 O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.

3 O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

4 Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.

5 For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

6 As for me, I said in my prosperity,
“I shall never be moved.”

7 By your favor, O LORD,
you made my mountain stand strong;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.

8 To you, O LORD, I cry,
and to the Lord I plead for mercy:

9 “What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you?

Will it tell of your faithfulness?

10 Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!

O LORD, be my helper!”

11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth
and clothed me with gladness,
12 that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

First Reading: Lamentations 3:22–33 (ESV):

22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.
26 It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
27 It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.

28 Let him sit alone in silence
when it is laid on him;
29 let him put his mouth in the dust—
there may yet be hope;
30 let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.

31 For the Lord will not
cast off forever,
32 but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

33 for he does not afflict from his heart
or grieve the children of men.

EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 13-15 (ESV):

Encouragement to Give Generously

8 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. 6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

THE GOSPEL - Mark 5:21–43 (ESV):

Jesus Heals a Woman and Jairus’s Daughter

21 And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. **22** Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet **23** and implored him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” **24** And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. **25** And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, **26** and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. **27** She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. **28** For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." **29** And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. **30** And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" **31** And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?' " **32** And he looked around to see who had done it. **33** But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. **34** And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." **35** While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" **36** But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." **37** And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. **38** They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. **39** And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." **40** And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. **41** Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." **42** And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. **43** And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Sermon 26 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“Redistribute Grace”

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15

Dear friends,

In our epistle lesson Paul talks about wealth and its sharing, its redistribution if you will. This is fair enough and what we often expect of epistles, there is usually a portion of the letter that will discuss something that sounds like this. The particular occasion that Paul is writing about is worth some discussion, but also the basis for Paul's words, why is he encouraging the Corinthians to do this? He gives explanations beyond what I expected at least, and so there's something to learn here. We know that God cares about our hearts, and that because of this God cares about our actions, how we do what we do here on this Earth. What I find strange about this passage in particular is that Paul seems to base this on something God Himself does first. Those What Would Jesus Do bracelets were cheesy, but not wrong, Jesus often is our example, but being an example involves doing it first, as you'll see, and Jesus did it first.

This is Second Corinthians, which means that Paul is trying to mend fences with the Christians at Corinth. That is what the first part of the letter is all about anyhow, but going into this second part Paul is busying himself with what he wants to teach the Corinthians. Remember Corinth is a trade city, it has a unique location which means that all Mediterranean trade passes through Corinth. This means that this city has money, and so we generally assume that the church in Corinth had some money as well, and Paul seems to confirm this with his words. Because their city got its wealth from trade, they were not as susceptible to things like famine or food-related disasters. Even if you had a bad harvest that year, you were still getting all your commercial taxes, so the city had a nicely diversified income for the lean times when the farms weren't producing. So Corinth is doing alright, and the church is as well, but not everyone is doing so great. Around this

time, severe famine hits the Middle-East, especially Judea, so the Christians in the Holy Land are having a really hard time making ends meet. Paul addresses what the Corinthians might be able to do about this in his letter.

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” Macedonia and Corinth are not the same place. Corinth is in Greece, Macedonia is north of Greece, but these churches have had very different experiences. Macedonia has had some serious trouble with persecution, Paul says, but that hasn't slowed them down one bit. Macedonia is still giving, despite the troubles up there. What does this have to do with Corinthians? Paul will explain that next.

“3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” So the idea of donating or giving money or food or resources was so important to the Macedonian churches that they practically begged Paul to be able to do that. The thing that Paul wants the Corinthians to think about is why, and that's what I want you to consider as well.

In this age that we live in of on-demand charity, where there are about ten million causes, all of them just fine, we are very used to be shamed, we are used to having our hearts pulled in a lot of different directions as to where we should use our charity. That's not what Paul is doing here, he does something like it in a bit. Paul is going in a theological direction, and I find that refreshing, if a little strange. Paul is doing a short little autopsy of theological mechanics of giving, and I want to do the same with you. He does it in one sentence, in verse 5, when he says the Macedonians didn't give because we expected them to, the Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord, and then they gave what they had to us.

This is exactly the power of our charity, and the reasons for it. You and I are Christians, we are accountable to God and to God alone. In the end, all of you will answer only to God, it is His face you see when you die, and it is Him who will judge you. Who cares what anyone else thinks, God is what matters, and that's a fairly reasonable attitude to have, but God has already told us that our charity should go beyond this. I have often told you that God doesn't need anything, He doesn't. He doesn't need our worship, He doesn't need our faith, He certainly doesn't need our money, the thought is silly, God owns everything. But, God often tells His people to give, to sacrifice, and to spend their time and their resources. Why? God doesn't need anything, so why is so much of Christianity about being generous, why does Jesus spend so much time teaching about basic compassion, and why does the entire Old Testament demand sacrifice?

God doesn't command these things because He needs them. God commands these things because *we* need them. Sin makes lack. Sin makes resources unevenly distributed. There are places that just have more, more usable land, better water, more natural resources. There are places that just have less. In the same way, there are people that have more, way more, and there are loads of people that have less. We supposedly did away with kings and queens when we made this country, but if you look at our economic situation, you see that we have way more in common with the medieval times than we like to admit. We have a small number of people with gobs of money and other resources, and we have a large number of people who are working to get by, pay the bills, day to day. Economically speaking, that's what medieval times looked like, and that's what Jesus' time looked like too. Again, sin creates this. It is not just the sin of man, it is the sin of the world, it makes this happen. God recognizes this all too well, and it is for this reason that so much of His Word is talking about us being generous and giving. Why does God ask us to be generous and give? Because He knows there are many needy men out there and they need it.

Furthermore, God Himself gives first, as Paul says. Paul says the Macedonian churches gave themselves to God, then they gave to their neighbor. That's exactly what we do. God gives first, He leads the charge, He always has. God gives His Word, He gives His promises, He gives redemption and the forgiveness of sins. In all of these, He gives to change our hearts from selfish sinner to generous saint. Jesus forgives our sins, yes He does, we all say that all the time, but what that means is that Jesus changes us. He changes who we are. He makes generosity rise out of us, because He was generous first, and that is exactly the way Jesus wanted it. That is why we give, because He gave first. Paul says in verse 9, **“9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”** It helps our charity be based in Him, rather than our own self-righteousness. The very second I start thinking of being charitable I get monstrously self-satisfied, I think of how incredibly awesome I am. Jesus shortcuts that by changing our hearts to be real generous, not just fake generous out to look good.

“6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.” Titus was in charge of collecting money and food for the churches in Jerusalem and the Holy Land during the famine I talked about earlier. If you want to help, Paul says, Titus is going out there and getting it done. When Titus comes to town, give him what you can, he'll make sure it gets to the folks that need it. Then Paul does urge them to do this, but he urges them to do it based on what Christ has done in them. You excel in everything, Paul says. That isn't flattery. Paul spends most of his time telling the Corinthians what massive, immoral screwups they are. He's not buttering them up, he's speaking to what the Corinthians really are. They are saints, perfect and holy, and they do excel at everything because Jesus excels at everything and because Jesus has made them that way. Paul is speaking to the Corinthians better nature, their saintly side.

Paul later goes on to how we should see wealth in verse 13. **“13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”** This sounds like Commie talk, redistributing the wealth, evening everything out, but we can't get around this. God regulates who gets what and when they get it, every good gift comes from above, like the manna from heaven in the Old Testament. God is in charge of all of that. Paul reminds us that God makes things go well in one place and not so well in another, and that what God wants from that is so that the places that have a lot can share with those that have a little. Why? Like I said earlier, this is exactly what Jesus did. We sinners had no righteousness, Jesus was perfectly righteous. Instead of hoarding it, God sent Jesus to give us His righteousness, to swap our poverty for His riches. Our giving, our compassion, should be the same. It should be like Jesus. We give what we have to them's that need it, and we do it remembering that Jesus gave us what we needed when we needed it, and what we needed most was righteousness, forgiveness, things like that. In our hour of need, Jesus comes to us. In our neighbor's hour or need, let us go to him, and show Him Jesus' compassion even if we don't even have an excuse to mention Jesus' name.

Many of you have spent your lives doing that, and I have no intention of telling you that you have been somehow neglecting this. That's not what I want you to take away. Let your conscience tell you, let God Himself tell you, whether you must do better or not. We can all do better. Harassing you isn't the point. On the rare occasions when I have asked you to donate to something, or whenever a suitable cause comes up, a need comes up in our midst, you have always been there, and I commend you. Again, what I want you to see is that echo of Jesus in your giving, in your compassion. He is there for you to give to you when you repent, He is there for you to hear you when you need something. That's

the way Jesus wants it. So that when you give to others, see yourself as part of that process. How does God give to people? Often, God gives to people through other people. You get to be a part of God's love and care and compassion, and you are still a sinner! That is quite the privilege. I always wondered why God lets sinners be part of His holy work, it seems like we'd just screw it up, but God does the hard work to make sure we don't, and when we do it goes the way He wants it anyway. You aren't just a Christian, you're a sinner who has been given mercy by God. You aren't just a consumer, you're a giver, who can show others that same mercy and that same compassion. God made you that way, and He makes you that way new again every day.

Amen