

Generous Giving: Giving Up

4th Sun. after Epiphany (PWAP #1) – 01/29/23
Mt. Calvary Luth. – Pastor Keith Besel
Text: Luke 7:36-50

v. 38 “...and standing behind [Jesus] at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment.”

Introduction

- ✘ The famous “Gospel in a Nutshell” passage; John 3:16 teaches us that God directly connects love to its resulting act of giving. It says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son”. And when you think of God’s Son, Jesus and His cross, what was it that motivated Him to willingly go to the cross to give His very life unto death? It was His immeasurable love for the souls of all mankind, wasn’t it?
 - ➔ So it is that the Triune God teaches us, both in His Word and His actions that you cannot love without giving.
- ✘ On the flip side of that, you can give without loving. Plenty of people give all kinds of time, treasure and talents in very lavish ways for all kinds of reasons without love – in order to make money, or to become popular, or to get something else that they want in return, or simply because someone forces them to give in one way or another.
 - ➔ But that is not the kind of giving that we’re talking about as we begin this year’s *People With A Purpose* journey under the theme of *Generous Giving*. No, what we’re talking about goes all the back, or maybe we should say it goes deep inside of the giver to see and understand who the giver is at the core.
 - ➔ 1 John 4:8, 10 does that again with God when John writes, “God is love. ... In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”. This is the essence; the model; the defining and driving force behind this year’s stewardship theme of *Generous Giving*.
- ✘ So, let’s think together for the next three Sundays about the idea of *Generous Giving*. And as we do, let’s not think about it only as being financial in nature, but far more as a lifestyle of deep love for Jesus Christ and extraordinary generosity in countless opportunities of love and service toward others for the advancement of God’s kingdom. This is to say that *Generous Giving* is primarily 1) relational and 2) missional, with a third added blessing, or component, of financial giving.

I. The Triangle of Generous Giving

- ✘ To help us in our understanding of this concept I want to suggest that we all think of a triangle. All triangles have three unique sides; each side has its own characteristics, yet you must have all three sides to make up one triangle.
 - ➔ The three sides of the *Generous-Giving* triangle for you and me and all Christian stewards are 1) “Giving Up,” which expresses our deep love for God; 2) “Giving Out,” that describes our profound love for those who are not yet followers of Jesus; and 3) “Giving In,” that speaks to our exemplary love for those who are already a part of God’s family; the Holy Christian Church. Like a triangle, every Christian steward, in his/her *Generous Giving* must have, and use all three of these components or characteristics.

II. A Story of Giving Up

- ✘ In our Gospel Reading today Luke immortalizes a woman who is an incredibly *Generous Giver*. Hers is an example of the *Giving Up* side of the triangle. It's not the kind of giving up that most of us think about when we hear of someone "giving up". She wasn't about quitting on God or walking away from her deep gratitude for the sins that she had been forgiven. No. "Giving Up" for her is an expression of deep devotion and affection toward Jesus, as well as giving up a generous gift of anointing Jesus' feet with costly perfume.
- ✘ So step into her story with me for a moment. Imagine living your adult life as one who is generally not accepted by society. Imagine the pain of disapproving looks almost anywhere that you go; having the reputation of being labeled "a sinner", as verse 37 says, in all avenues of life. And as we see, those from the religious community are some of the quickest to condemn her. So if they condemn her, it would make sense for her to conclude that God must reject her as well, right?
 - ➔ Yet as we see in verse 47, Jesus declares the exact opposite of that judgement upon her. He lovingly and boldly tells her that the condition of her sin and soul are fully cleansed and forgiven. "Therefore I tell you," said Jesus, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven". Her history is fully acknowledged. Jesus does not shun her as others do, but includes her in His "Generous Gift" of grace. "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50).
- ✘ But let's go back to the drama inside the home of Simon, the Pharisee for moment. Pharisees were experts of the Jewish rules, laws and traditions, many of which came from the Old Testament, but many, also, that were concocted by man to "aid them", they thought in being able to actually observe those rules and laws to "perfection".
 - ➔ Simon invites Jesus to sit at his table for a meal. In that day table fellowship was "supposed" to be a sign of unity and agreement in belief.
 - ➔ But now this woman shows up, uninvited with a jar of costly perfume. To break social protocol even more, she approaches Jesus, the guest and wets His feet with her tears; wiping them clean with her hair; kissing His feet and anointing them with her perfume.
- ✘ And because Jesus doesn't immediately turn her away or condemn her actions Simon even becomes critical of Jesus. "If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner" (v. 39). Their assumption? How could Jesus be who He says He is if He allows the likes of her to be in His presence?
- ✘ But of course, Jesus is the very Son of God, and so He knows exactly who this woman is and also what is going on inside Simon's head and heart.
 - ➔ So He shares a faith story about two men who are both in debt and neither one of them can pay what they owe. One owes the equivalent of about 20 months' salary while the other owes around two months' salary, yet both man's debts are completely canceled because of the extreme generosity of the lender.
 - ➔ Jesus asks Simon, "Which of them will love [the lender] more?" (v. 42) Simon answers what is obvious to everyone at the dinner. "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt". To which Jesus gives an answer that I'm sure made Simon puff up with pride, "You have judged rightly" (v. 43).
- ✘ But then, it's as if Jesus popped Simon's pride with the dagger of God's perfect Law when He reveals the point of His story for everyone at the party to hear. From the time of His arrival, none of the self-proclaimed religious "experts" offered God's promised Messiah and only-begotten Son the honor or respect that even a normal guest should have received; no water to wash His feet; no expression of generosity or humility or honor. But this societal outcast; she washed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and "did not cease to kiss [His] feet"

(v. 45). Even more, God's "anointed One" which is the meaning of the word "Messiah", proclaimed the depth of her sorrow for her sins, her humility, her worship and faith in Jesus by liberally anointing His feet – pouring out – or we might say "giving up" her costly perfume for Jesus. And so Jesus publically declared His judgment, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little" (v. 47).

→ Now, we need to be crystal clear here about Jesus' point. It is not that this woman gave a lot to get a lot. No. Jesus' interaction, story, and conclusion uncovers the woman's generous giving as an extravagant act of love toward God in response to what she first received and already knew of as God's unconditional love for her!

✘ It's an amazing contrast isn't it? The one who was certain that he deserved much from God; who believed he knew all about God, actually knew almost nothing of the truth that God had revealed in Scripture and through His Son. But the one who everyone was certain knew nothing about God and they believed deserved even less, is the one who showed that she knew deeply the severity of her sin and not only knew, but believed and confessed all that anyone needs to know about God and His *Generous Gift* of love and forgiveness and restoration through His Son, Jesus Christ.

→ Hers is a story of relationship, beginning and ending, as it must with Jesus. Jesus loves her, and she responds with love. Rather than exclude her, Jesus forgives her sin and restores her to Himself. It's only because Jesus "gives up" everything for her, that she is able and eager to "give everything up" for Jesus in response. This is the foundation of Christian Stewardship. Without Jesus you and I, along with the woman, have nothing of value to even give. Yet His love for us gives us and all that we have enormous value, all of which we now humbly and eagerly "give up" for Him in giving to others.

III. Jesus Gives Up to Give Forgiveness

✘ Let's explore that relational leg of the triangle just a bit more, so that we do not turn God's *Generous Giving* into something that we think we deserve or something we think we can earn as Simon and the Pharisees did in today's text.

→ You see, God's love is not measured out according to a person's capacity to keep religious rules or laws. Our religious or earthly performance does not define the Gospel of God's love. Jesus acts first because He is love. Jesus forgives because He is the Savior. Only Jesus makes lives whole that can never accomplish wholeness by "trying harder" or "measuring up" to some set of requirements.

→ You see, "measuring up" and "giving up" are two completely different dynamics with two very different results. To "measure up" means that I somehow pass the test or meet the standard so that I can then be congratulated for my achievement; "measuring up" is all about me!

→ But to "Give Up" in the sense of *Generous Giving*, is to recognize that I can never pass the test or meet the standard, or perform at a level that allows me to bypass my sin. So in humble repentance I first "give up" trying to accomplish or earn God's acceptance by myself and I simply hear and celebrate Jesus when He says, "You are forgiven".

→ Though we, like the woman in her tears may think that full forgiveness is a gift that is too much for us to receive, we believe through God's gift of faith, that forgiveness is the gift that is not too much for Jesus to give.

→ The words of the famous hymn "Rock of Ages" says it this way:

*Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.*

*Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die. (LSB 761:3)*

- ✘ We cannot separate the cross of Christ from this amazing encounter with Christ in our text. For the same feet that the woman holds and caresses, are the feet that were nailed to the cross; the same voice that speaks words of forgiveness, is the voice that cries, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). And the debt required by the Father for your sin, my sin and the sins of all human flesh is paid in full; not by the woman or any of us, but only by God's Son. His *Generous Giving* is an extravagant, extraordinary act of love that only God can give. It's always and only, all about Him!

Conclusion

- ✘ He is the source and the focus of true Christian Stewardship. *Generous Giving* and *Giving Up* is God's gift to us in the fullest of measures. So much so that you and I can't help but *Give Up* His love for us in *Generous Giving* back to Him and to His world; always for His glory. Amen.