

NEW 8 WEEK SERMON
SERIES:

Growing Pains



Part 1 and Part 2 sermons from Sunday

September 20- 8:30 service

Epistle Lesson: Philippians 1: 21-30

Sermon: Growing Pains: **Being Generous Part1**

Preacher: Kirstie Engel

On the surface this passage does not appear to have anything to do with generosity.

However when Paul lifts up an exhortation to this new Christian Community, he was encouraging them to live like Christ; for living is Christ and dying is gain (v21), the question that I would like us to wrestle with is what does it mean to live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ?

And so I am certain that most would answer this question immediately; that to live like Christ means simply to love; for the answer is always love right...so the sermon should be over then correct?

And I would suggest that yes to live like Christ does indeed mean to love; but what I have come to realize is that not everybody typically has the same understanding of what love is...

For some of us, we have not have very good examples of love in our lives.

For there are some marriages where sometimes after 20 years

together or more, a partner will have received the Earth shattering news that, "I love you, but I am not in love with you anymore."

For others, perhaps their childhoods reflected some deficit of love.

If you think about it, even in the midst of a pandemic, dating websites such as E-Harmony, Christian Mingle and more has not suffered in the slightest, because the Coronavirus did not erase the desire for some of us to find a special true love; our soul mate....

This is also why the industry of dog shelters and cat shelters and other services that sells pets are also not being as affected by the conditions of our world, because our fur babies have also been an excellent remedy for love.

So love is a desired emotion that I would suggest most if not all yearns for and strives to have.

This idea of love as it pertains to relationships that are either familial, romantic or the love we experience in friendships is what I would suspect most of us think of when we examine what it means to love.

However God's love is somewhat different than perhaps the love you and I are familiar with.

Yes God loves us in the manner that you and I are used to....

God's love is described more as Agape in which I have preached before.

And to recall what the term Agape means, it is a Greco-Christian term referring to love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for human and of human for God".

The word is not to be confused with philia, brotherly love or sisterly love, or philautia, self-love, as it embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance.

It is a love that goes beyond just the emotions to the extent of seeking the best for others.

Agape was also used by the early Christians to refer to the self-sacrificing love of God for humanity, which they were committed to reciprocating and practicing towards God and among one another.

This understanding is built upon the foundational Hebrew concept of Chesed, or the lovingkindness of God, which is taught throughout the Old Testament.

So to unpack all of this and put it into laypersons terms, God's love is not wishy-washy.

God's love is not conditional.

God's love is not biased.

God's love is unmerited..

God's love again is the highest order of love than you and I can ever attain or even attempt to replicate...

But the closest that you and I can strive for with the help of the Lord is by way of Chesed.....

For in its positive sense, the word Chesed is used to describe a kindness or love between people;

Chesed is mutual benevolence; a mercy between people; it is loving-kindness.....

This my friends is a good place for us to strive to achieve....

And some of us may still be a little hazy as to what to with this idea of Chesed that is typically a Hebrew concept again; it is certainly a concept that does not seem to fit into today's time and perhaps our own culture....

But my aha moment then is that perhaps a good place individually for us to begin to grasp the concept of Chesed, is to learn what it means to be generous first...

And please do not be insulted by this suggestion, for I am certain that the impulse is to say to me, "Kirstie, I am generous!"

I give to the Church every week.

I strive to put others before myself.

And so I affirm those statements, I really do.

For I too do not consider myself to be a selfish person either... ish....

Because I thought it might be helpful to bring up the definition of generous to help this conversation along a little.

So the definition of generous as an adjective is a person who shows a readiness to give more of something, money or time, than is strictly necessary or expected.

Similarly, to be generous is to show kindness towards others.....

Being generous means being liberal in giving, openhanded....

Being generous means to be free from meanness or smallness of mind or character....

Being generous invites us to have clear and clean motives as we give without expecting anything in return.

Being generous is the springboard to how you and I begin to embody Chesed.

In fact I would submit that you and I cannot achieve Chesed without being generous.

Furthermore you and I cannot love as God loves without being generous.

So you see church family, when I am talking about being generous I am not just talking about being generous from a monetary standpoint.

Generosity is the foundation that undergirds the membership vows that we make to the church; to devote our time, talent gifts, service and witness to our community and take it out to the world.

Generosity displayed in these ways I believe is a tangible way to love not just through our words, but through our actions!

And so with that, the reason why I am naming generosity as a growing pain; because frankly friends, there are some ways that I

am incredibly generous; if someone needs food, I will give them some; if someone needs resources, I will help them find it...

But when looking at generosity from the vantage point of what I just shared, I cannot speak for you but I can speak for myself and say with confidence and a spirit of confession, that I still have some work to do.

For in this message, the questions that I will continue to wrestle with and perhaps this will resonate with you us asking myself ,
“Am I generous with the time that I pour into people...and do I listen to them...like really listen to them?”

“Am I generous with the spiritual gifts that I may be able to bring to the table?” I know that all of our time is precious and there always need to be a balance. However, if I am honest, I could do better in this area....making time to spend with others and sharing my spiritual gifts that could possibly help someone else and vice versa.

So again I can only speak for myself; that the idea of Chesed is a beautiful place to be and exist in the world....but before I can get there, there is some work that I need to do in the area of generosity; that extends beyond what my bank account may have.

For the level of generosity that I am suggesting is embedded in the gospel of Love is a sacrifice...

The level of generosity that I am suggesting may be challenging for us....

But I submit if we as God's people can work on these areas, we will get that much closer to being Christ like...

You and I will get that much closer to achieving Chesed....

One witness who I believe achieved this Chesed would be the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; who even various forms of cancer throughout her lifetime could not stop her mission for equal rights for women in particular and so much more;

As the world knows she fought the good fight until the age of 87 and actress Kerry Washington tweeted “Her rest is earned. It is our turn to fight.

This my friends is what it means to be generous with our time, talents, gifts, service and witness!

For everything that Christ did was for the mission of others...

Everything Christ stood for seldom stood for the things that you or I might subscribe to;

When the Word says that Christ said that “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Lk 9:58; Matt 8:20); is like generosity on steroids...

This is love in action at its finest

Not doing things for others just to be seen, but because it is the right thing to do...

And like Paul plainly speaks in this section of his letter....that what is being required of us often counteracts with the flesh....

What Paul is describing is sometimes counterintuitive especially

in the midst of the hardships that surround us.

Not to mention in this particular section, Paul does not give us an explicit direction of how to live for Christ per se.

But I am confident as I read the last part of Paul's letter once more looking at verse 27 when it says...Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; that beginning to explore these areas of generosity as it pertains to our time, talents, gifts, service and witness....that this is a good place for us all to start or continue with.

I am even more hopeful and optimistic that leading our lives with this intentionality will bring us that much closer to Chesed; it will bring us that much closer to understanding the vastness of God's Agape love for all of humanity!

Let the Church say Amen!

September 20- 10:45 service

First Lesson: Psalm 105: 1-6, 37-45

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 20: 1-16

Sermon: Growing Pains: **Being Thankful Part 2**

Preacher: Kirstie Engel

Some may look at our gospel and immediately ask, what in the world can this passage in Matthew have to do with being thankful?

For often times when we hear the exhortation or reminder to be thankful, we think of it in terms of gratitude;

Gratitude for our family, gratitude for our homes, our vehicles, even perhaps having gratitude for life....

And don't get me wrong, this is awesome, to be thankful in these ways...

But just like in our 8:30 service, I questioned essentially if you and I are barely scraping the surface of what it means to love; that perhaps the true call when God says to love surpasses the emotions that we might feel towards one another;

But instead the agape love we might strive for is a love that is steeped in the foundation of unconditional generosity as it pertains not to just the material items that we have; but as it pertains to how we share our time, talents, gifts, service and witness; those are our membership vows to the Church and to the world;

In the same respect, perhaps how we strive to live out thankfulness, goes beyond the surface lists of journaling who and what we may cherish in our lives and have gratitude for;

Perhaps the call for us is to strive to live out this idea of thankfulness as a verb; where our actions as it pertains to our time, talents, gifts, service and witness becomes this force like a wind.....so strong and so bold, that wherever it blows; you and I can tell **that thankful hearts have been there.....**

And so looking at our gospel this morning and applying this idea of thankfulness in action to this passage; it is hopefully now a little easier for you to detect where I am going with this parable...

Because this parable begins in the familiar world in which day laborers are hired at sunup and are paid at the end of the day, in accordance with the Torah regulation and Jewish practice.

And then the parable takes an interesting turn of events, when instead of the manager being sent to hire these laborers; we learn that the landowner himself goes to the market to hire laborers.

The landowner goes repeatedly, even at the “eleventh hour’ which is 5 pm.

No explanation is given as to why those “standing idle” had not been hired on earlier recruitment visits.

What we do know is that the first group workers is hired on the base of an oral contract for the normal amount ; the later groups are promised, “whatever is right,’ thereby raising, but not answering the, the question of what is “right?”

Although the first group has a “contract” and the second can only trust in the master’s sense of justice, in reality both groups depend n the trustworthiness of the landowner.

In the closing scene in which all are paid the same, beginning with the last that were recruited first and then the first last; the first raises what on the surface seems to be a fair point.

That essentially they should be paid more because they were out there longer than the ones who were recruited pretty much towards the end of the shift.

Instead they all were paid the same, leaving a lot of biblical scholars and perhaps even us stunned.

For it may seem that this parable told by Jesus missed the mark on what is just and what is fair.

In fact in today's world, it is a no brainer that for instance my husband in the restaurant would not pay a server who only worked 1 hour to a server who worked 8 hours the same wage.

So what is Jesus really trying to do with all of this "last will be first, and first will be last business?"

Has Jesus lost his mind?

Furthermore, should the first recruited workers be thankful in this situation?

I am certain we know that the later workers recruited might be grinning like the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland. And to be honest, friends I like other scholars engaging this passage do not necessarily know what to do with a parable that is counter cultural to our business practices today.

However I am feeling the main message and Word for us to feast off of and gain wisdom from in the owners reply to some of these disgruntled workers in verse 13 where he says to them *'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? (14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. (15) Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'*

And with that I imagine this landowner metaphorically drop the mic at their feet and walked away...

Showing the world what the heart of equity and the heart of God looks like at it's finest.

Because in all honesty, in this story, there are so many lessons and values you and I can take away from this.

And how I am engaging this parable in hopefully a fresh way that you and I can relate to is that the first set of servants in this parable were not exhibiting thankfulness in action...

Because the truth of the matter is why should we bothered that the landowner blessed the servants who worked for only an hour with the same of the workers who worked all day?

It was the landowners choice after all....and perhaps the landowner was in an especially good mood on that day? Perhaps, this was the landowners way of paying his own

blessings forward; to help others?

Perhaps the owner knew some of the circumstances of the men that worked for only an hour and had mercy towards them?

We do not know why the landowner extended this sort of generosity towards the men who only worked an hour, What we do know is that for some reason, this generosity frustrated the ones who worked longer.

They were no longer grateful for the wage that they agreed to and received.

They were so disturbed by the generosity towards the latter group that they were incensed that they did not get more.

And placing this type of emotion and attitude towards today's time, this is the same sentiment that we see play out....

There seems to be a lot of energy surrounding power and money in our world.

There seems to be a lot of energy placed on making sure that those who have, has in abundance;

Meanwhile those who do not have are left waiting like the Canaanite woman of the demon-possessed child; waiting for the metaphorical crumbs to fall from the masters table. (Matt 15: 21-28).

And for some, a system like this is just and fair if you are part of the privileged group on the receiving end.

For others not so much.

I will say with clarity, I am not ok with a system like this.

I am not ok with a world like this.

Furthermore, my aha moment, is that in order to eradicate systems such as this; it will take more metaphorical landowners out there who will do just what was done in this parable.

It will take metaphorical landowners like the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg who was my she-ro; as she paved the way for myself and many other women in particular to walk with their head high and their confidence intact!

A landowner who has respect for all of the laborers in an equal way;

Laborers who **I would presume need to make a living.**

Laborers **who all desired to make a living.**

And one act of generosity, allowed this to happen.

And as a member of the church, seeing this owners action from this perspective makes me thankful.

I am thankful to gain a glimpse of the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven within this parable.

I am thankful that the heart of God represents a gospel where we are all viewed with intrinsic worth and value.

The landowner demonstrated for me the essence of what it means to be blessed to be a blessing...for I believe that God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to someone else...

In fact every experience that we go through and rise above, I am convinced it is so that in those lessons that we learn, we can pay it forward to someone else.

So I suppose the takeaway as a church is to resist harboring the sentiments of our early recruited laborers; who grumbled as to why the latter was paid the same and instead **be thankful**....

Be thankful that we serve a God who sees us all with equal love and respect...

Be thankful for the heart of God and for who God is.....

A God of equity, a God of Justice; a God who is Agape Love; the highest order of the entire Universe...

Be thankful for the generous action of the landowner that is paving the way for the Church to help advance the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven....

Be thankful for the landowner that teaches us how when each and everyone comes together as living generous individuals and forms the Church, for we are the church; this is how we move our gratitude to the next level; Where our thankfulness becomes a living, breathing force; Where our active expression of gratitude for all that God has done for us and on behalf of us; becomes a powerful force of love in action that cannot be reckoned with.....

**O give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name,
make known known deeds among the peoples.**

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