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November 1, 2023
Scripture: Luke 6: 27-38
Sermon Title: A Generous Life

Prayer...

Today is Generosity Sunday where we bring our pledge cards and highlight our mission as a church that seeks to be generous to all creation. In preparation for our message today, I looked up Scriptures with the theme of generosity. I found it interesting that the text we are looking at today connects generosity with loving one's enemies and choosing not to judge others. For Jesus, there seems to be a correlation that a generous life, a generous person is one who loves everyone and who gives without expectation of any return.

To me this feels very countercultural. In our society, there is a tendency to take care of me and mine and to be more cautious about what we give to others. There is especially a strong resistance to being kind and compassionate to one's enemies. What we see as more common in society is a spirit of judgment toward those who believe or think

differently than we do. How easy is it to harbor our own opinions and to avoid a relationship with those we view as the enemy.

Jesus is not afraid to critique his followers and to call them to a higher standard of generosity. What is wild about Jesus is that the enemy he is referring to includes the Romans. Jesus is speaking to an oppressed group of Jewish people and calling them to love. The turning of the other cheek that we read about in this passage is not a passive action, but instead is a defiant choice of love that is meant to be an active resistance to the violence that defines the Roman military's actions. Jesus calls his followers to nonviolence and love as a form of resistance to hate and oppression.

One of our church's mission partners is Bob Ekblad. Bob has extensive ministry contacts around the world as he has traveled widely, including places like Israel/Palestine. In this week's devotion sent to his mission connections, he reflected on Jesus' love for his enemies. Bob writes,

“Though Jesus lived his life under the brutality of Roman imperial occupation, he never called for or justified retaliatory violence, and neither must we his followers today! Jesus called for and embodied active enemy love (Lk 6:27-36), practicing indiscriminate healing, deliverance and acts of compassion, including Jews and non-Jews alike....

Jesus actively lived out his humble, non-violent, retaliatory love to the extreme, allowing himself to be condemned to death by his own people, and brutally executed by the Roman Empire. Jesus died on the cross to forever “break down the walls of division,” “abolishing in his flesh the enmity” (Eph 2:15), “putting to death the hostility” (Eph 2:16), “preaching peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who are near” (Eph 2:17).

Now is the time for followers of Jesus to make a clear and consistent break with normal human reasoning and justifications regarding

violence and war. Otherwise, we present the world with a counter-witness to Jesus' way of saving and announcing the kingdom of God!

In these polarizing times we must be careful to not bear witness from a place of judgment or condescension, but from a humble posture of seeking understanding, and informed solidarity with victims. Jesus leads the way in identifying with the victim by himself becoming a victim. He models extreme intercession, asking his Father to forgive the worst perpetrators of injustice and violence- those torturing and killing God himself!

In these times of war may our intercession and lamentation include Israelis and Palestinians, civilians and soldiers, Hamas and Hezbollah combatants, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Israeli Defense Force, children and adults, Muslims, Jews, and Christians. And while we're at it let us include Russians and Ukrainians, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, believers and non-believers, and anyone else who's on the other side of whatever lines we've drawn.

Our intercession will also lead us to denounce injustices, pursue concrete peace-building activities, advocacy for the vulnerable, and other prophetic actions. May these actions be deliberately informed by indiscriminate love that refuses evil and drives away all fear. In this way we will offer the world an alternative that looks more and more like overcoming evil with good, rather than being ourselves overcome by evil.” Humble and wise words from our mission partner Bob Ekblad.

Bob reminds us, that regarding judgment towards one’s neighbors, Jesus is clear that those who judge will be judged. Instead of judging we are called to love the other. This does not mean we don’t have opinions or strong values. However, Jesus is calling us to a posture of humility and kindness that helps bring about peace. We are invited to have a spirit of forgiveness and grace rather than a heart of enmity towards one another. When two people come together with humility and not judgement then compromise and hope may be born.

On this generosity Sunday, I am particularly intrigued by Jesus's words that those who give freely will also receive in abundance. As Jesus says, "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Jesus has earlier stated that we are to give without expectation of receiving something in return, but it is interesting that a generous life of giving according to Jesus leads to a great return.

I think about this in relationship to our church, Newberg First Presbyterian. Why are we here? Why do we give of our time, talent, and treasure to this community? I think it is because we understand as followers of Jesus, we are called to be a community of love for the world. We are to give without the need to receive and yet as we give of our lives in abundance, God will grow the mission of this church.

What is our mission? To continue to be a Christ centered church of grace, hope, and love here in Newberg and through our mission efforts

throughout the United States and the broader world. This year our church gave \$10,000 from the mission portion of our capital campaign and under the guidance of our mission partner Taliilee Fiqruu thousands of Bibles were created for Ethiopians who speak the Arsi Oromo language. These Bibles are the first ever in that language and were developed with the help of our mission partner Taliilee Fiqruu and her husband Urgessa Biru. This year we gave more than \$3,500 to help support the building of an orphanage in India with our friend the Rev. Divakar Undurthi and his family. This week I met a mother who works locally at the Willow Assisted Living facility as she came by our church to receive free bikes for her family as part of our Love Inc. sponsored bike ministry. She was very grateful to our church. To date, Elise Prayzich tells me we have given away 83 bikes this year and 621 total since March of 2017 when we started this ministry.

These are only a few of our mission efforts. The beauty of being a church community is that we get to do mission work together. We have the opportunity and privilege to be a generous community together.

This fall I have focused on what it means for us to embody compassionate Christianity. What a joy to be part of a church that chooses to love our enemies and not judge others. How wonderful that we choose to welcome everyone and to focus on peacemaking.

Recently a few leaders from our church met to do some visioning as a team. Deacon Mindi Hynes was in this group and she highlighted that for her our church is one major place where she encounters the presence of the Holy Spirit strongly. She described our church as a safe place where everyone is on a sacred spiritual journey. Kristen Sandoz describes our church as womblike because of its safety. I appreciate this image from Kristen. To me this shows that at our church in addition to imaging God as Father, we appreciate the mother image of God who holds us in her womb. My wife Karen Murphy reminds me regularly that

our church is to be a house of prayer where we experience a relational knowing of God and where we also are encouraged to meet God in nature.

This morning we are remembering Saints from our church who embodied great love and compassion in their lives. As we live out our mission as a church, we continue a legacy of love carried on by this congregation for 133 years. In many ways, I feel a sense of loyalty to God ultimately, but also to the Saints of the past to continue the unique mission of our church. Today again, we especially remember our friends who passed away within the last year, Alan Kolb, Moriah McManimie, Vera Patten, Doris Feenstra, Edith Parrish, Adah Doty, and Harriet Fowler. These precious souls and many others inspire us to have generous lives and to be a generous spiritual community.

Thank you for being generous. Jesus promises as we live generous lives we will experience an abundance of grace that enables us to fulfill God's mission in the world. Please pray with me.

Luke 6:27-38

27 “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; 28 bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.[a] Your reward will be great, and you will

be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”