

Gospel-Motivated Generosity

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[0:00] If among you one of your brothers should become poor in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God has given you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen. So, as some of you may know, Elaine and I are huge fans of board games. Any other board game fans out there? Yes. Let's all get together and play sometime.

There are a few that we don't play, though, because of their overwhelming potential to cause anger and frustration. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Now, the first game I ever played that had this tendency to kindle wrath was none other than Monopoly.

Play Monopoly in my family growing up, and the game was bound to end with someone throwing the board across the room. And that is not an exaggeration. Monopoly just seems designed to tick people off. Think about it. You're trying to hoard up as much money and property as possible, and if you crush everyone else in the process, that is even better.

The sad thing is that human beings have a tendency to live our lives that way.

[1:37] To hoard and to accumulate as much as we can, and to step on as many heads as we need to in order to climb the ladder of success. But the Bible shows us that we, as Christians, are called to a different way, to a better way, to be generous to those in need.

I don't know about you, but I never saw any generosity in Monopoly. Now, the new ACNA Luxonary twists our arm into preaching on this topic this Sunday.

With the readings we were given, it was pretty much unavoidable. I have to admit that it's one that I take up with a bit of fear and trembling, for a couple reasons, I think. First of all, in our current politically charged and polarized climate, if you start talking about caring for the poor, someone's going to start wondering if you're a secret communist.

Secondly, talking about generosity to those in need is uncomfortable, I think, because often we aren't as generous as we're called to be. Well, on the first point, I will begin by assuring you that I'm not a communist. Were you worried about that?

Now, I would suspect that in our church, like in most churches, we have a wide range of views represented on politics and economics. So let me just say that that's not primarily what I'm talking about this morning.

[3:08] There are a couple of attitudes common in our societal environment, though, that I would caution each of us to avoid imitating in our own lives. Now, one of those is this attitude that people have to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

You ever heard that one? Some of us have probably said that, for that matter. If you're a Christian, and you see someone in need, and you have that attitude, quite frankly, you are forgetting what God has done in your life.

Did God take the attitude with you that you needed to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps? Is that how God works? Of course not, or you would still be in your sins.

Did you earn God's grace when God called you to himself? Did you earn God's mercy when Jesus died for you? Of course you didn't. Now, we also need to avoid the attitude that, well, if we pay our taxes, and the government is providing social services and help to those in need, then we've done our duty.

That's just not the case. The Bible calls you to be generous personally. For you personally to be generous with what you have. Now, whatever you think about the role of the government in economics and social welfare and all that kind of stuff, and I suspect that we do have a range of opinions represented here this morning, this much is clear.

[4:37] Your first priority as a Christian in caring for those in need is to do everything you can to help yourself personally. Not help yourself.

There was a comma there. It's, of course, true that many times we aren't as generous as we've been called to be. The reminder of that stings a little bit, and it probably should.

But I assure you, I'm not standing here to pile on the guilt this morning. Our speaker at this year's diocesan senate, Ashley Null, pointed out that part of the problem with the church in America is that in most churches, the preachers step into the pulpit week after week in order to fuss at the people in the pews.

I'm not here to fuss at you this morning. Now, depending on the church, the fussing could be about all kinds of things. It might be about the wickedness of dancing. It might be about the wickedness of not using energy-efficient light bulbs.

But either way, there's a whole lot of fussing going on, and that's not what I'm trying to do. I am out to preach the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ and to talk about how the gospel changes our perspective on how we bless others, how the gospel transforms our hearts, making our hearts generous in a way that only the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus can.

[6:05] Let's talk about generosity to those in need. In our psalm appointed for this morning, the psalmist says this about the righteous person.

He is distributed freely. He is given to the poor. Now, we might ask, why are God's people called to give freely? What motivates us?

And that's really what I want us to think about this morning. First of all, I want to be absolutely clear on this. We don't practice generosity. We don't practice giving in order to earn or merit or purchase our salvation.

Our salvation has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and not by anything that we have done or will do. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of work so that no one may boast. In fact, the reason we are called to be generous is the exact opposite of doing it to score points with God.

[7:13] To understand our motivation for generosity, we have to start with the gospel. And that's why Paul, encouraging the Corinthian Christians to give to poor Christians in Jerusalem, says this in 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9.

Look here with me in 2 Corinthians 8. 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.

Well, wonder why we're called to be generous? There's your answer. That is why we're called to give to those in need.

Because when we were rebels against God, when we were dead in trespasses and sin, when we were helpless, even then God the Son became flesh and dwelt among us.

Living a perfectly righteous life and dying the death of a criminal to pay for our sins and to give us his righteousness as a free gift so that we can have forgiveness and eternal life.

[8:26] Can you imagine love more extravagant than the love that God has shown us in Jesus? When you know love, when you know grace, when you know generosity like that, when you have received such an abundance and you have received it freely, doesn't that change the way that you look at absolutely everything?

My brothers and my sisters, God saw us in dire need. He saw us in poverty. And what did he do? He sent his only Son to become poor for us so that we might become rich.

And not rich in the sense that we're all going to have big mansions and private jets. Nope. It is even better than that. Rich in the sense that we have new life and victory over death through Christ.

Because of what Christ has done, we have a treasure that is exceedingly better than all of the riches of this world. And we have it as a gift of grace.

So we don't give of our time or of our resources in order to win God over to our side or in order to make us feel good. We give.

[9:46] We give. We give. We give. Because we know that we have everything we need in Jesus Christ and that we have done nothing to deserve it.

God's extravagant love transforms us into people who love others. That's just what happens. A heart that has been transformed by the grace of God is going to be a loving and a generous heart.

And what a testimony to the world that is. What a testimony. It's the next point I want us to think about this morning. About why we give.

Why we're generous. Paul tells the Corinthians in our text in verses 8 and 9, But as you excel in everything in faith and speech and knowledge and all earnestness and in our love for you see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. Paul is saying using the example of the Macedonian Christians who were generous that if you give it will demonstrate that your love for God and for your brothers and sisters and for your neighbors is real in your life.

[11:12] Why is that important? Well, Jesus had some things to say about that. In John 13, 35 Jesus says By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

And again, Jesus says in Matthew 5, 16 Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

When Christians care for those in need, the world has no choice but to sit up and take notice.

Pastor and author Tim Keller says this about the witness of the early church.

The early church was strikingly different from the culture around it in this way. The pagan society was stingy with its money and promiscuous with its body.

A pagan gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. And the Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body and they gave practically everybody their money.

[12:25] Striking, isn't it? Now we need to be clear.

Caring for those in need is one of the unavoidable implications of the gospel but that is not itself the gospel. These days people throw around talk about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked as if that is what the gospel is.

I see that all the time. People saying this is the message of Jesus. We've gotten it all wrong. Well, that is an example of what we call the social gospel which tends to emphasize these things but also tends to ignore the reality of sin our desperate need for salvation in Jesus Christ and tends to act as if we are going to usher in the kingdom of God by our own good deeds.

But the gospel is what Christ has done. It's not what we have done.

It changes our lives. It impacts the lives of our neighbors but we need to be clear that we cannot save ourselves we can't save anyone else we can't save the world.

[13:45] That is God's job not ours. As Anglican evangelicals however we stand in a long line of those who have touched the lives of people in need.

Our camp for lack of a better description was for example at the forefront of fighting for the abolition of slavery of setting up soup kitchens to feed the hungry of teaching illiterate people to read of advocating for the poor and vulnerable in society and why have we done that over the centuries and why should we keep doing it?

Because we believe the gospel and we believe the Bible. The gospel that we believe causes our hearts to overflow with love for those in need.

We desire to be obedient to the word of God which tells us that as Christians our calling is to be generous to care for those who are hurting and vulnerable.

So if we don't have that as a priority not only are we not being very good Christians but we're not being very good Anglicans either. So what does all of this mean for us?

[15:07] I think that the application this morning is really pretty straightforward. Starting on the individual level pray about how you can reach out to help those in need.

If you see someone in need do what you can to help and this is especially true of your fellow Christians. Not because you're called to play favorites and you're certainly not called to ignore unbelievers who are in need but because you need to make sure that your family is okay and other Christians are your family.

And this calling isn't just for us as individuals either. It's for us as a congregation. It's why we've been involved in these 40 days of prayer for mission and evangelism.

The love of Jesus drives us to reach out to those who are hurting in our community. And if people don't see the love of Jesus in us they're not going to listen to anything that we have to say.

I regularly hear from people in my generation talking about one of the joys of being a millennial pastor here that Christians are mean that Christians are judgmental that Christians are uncaring.

[16:26] That's the image that we have in some circles. When people who think along those lines meet Christians who are caring and considerate it rattles all of their assumptions.

They don't know what to do with that. And they've become more open to the gospel. I realize that we're never going to get everyone to like us. Jesus gave us a heads up that that wasn't going to happen.

But we can work to make sure that we don't discredit the name of Jesus by our witness. Part of our calling as a congregation is to care for others including those in our community outside of our walls because the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ compels us.

And because we want to show the world that this gospel that we proclaim is true and that it changes human hearts. So for example some of you might be wondering what is driving our desire to minister to those in our community who have been impacted by addiction.

Why are we having Narcan training at the church next month? Well the answer is simple. The Bible calls us to reach out to those in need and I think that it's hard to find a more pressing need in our community than what is going on with the opioid addiction epidemic.

[18:03] We're going to reach out to those in need in our community. That's a great and important place to start. we reach out to people who are hurting people who are in need because we believe in a God who saw us in need with no way of helping ourselves and what did he do?

He sent his only son to die for us and rise again. And again I say that's not because we deserved it that is not because we earned it or anything quite the opposite.

but he did it because he is good and merciful and loving and that is the kind of God that we serve.

So we are called to take heed to what God told Israel in Deuteronomy 15.

You shall open wide your hand to your brother to the needy and to the poor in your land. Why? Why would we do that? Why would you do that?

Because 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.

[19:25] Please pray with me. Father we pray today that you would give us more of a heart that you would enlarge our hearts for those who are hurting who are in need that you would give us the will to seek them out and the ability to help them that we might show your love to our community that those who are hurting and that those who are in need would be relieved and that many come to believe the gospel and be saved in the precious name of Jesus Amen