**Go And Do Likewise- a sermon on generosity**

**By Deacon Timothy Siburg**

**Suggested Scripture Passages for Worship (NRSV translations)**

**First Lesson: Ruth 1:16-18**: But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die- there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

**Psalm 24:** The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

**Second Lesson: Galatians 5:22-23**: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

**Gospel Lesson: Luke 10:25-37**:

“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed on by the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

**“GO AND DO LIKEWISE”**

***A Sermon on Generosity, and part of the
Nebraska Synod’s 2022 Sermon Series on the Fruits of the Spirit***

**By Deacon Timothy Siburg, Nebraska Synod’s Director for Mission, Innovation & Stewardship**

Grace and peace from God in Christ, who is with you, for you, and who loves you. Amen.

“Go and do likewise.”[[1]](#footnote-1) “Go and do likewise.” That is what Jesus tells the lawyer who first asks what he must do to inherit eternal life,[[2]](#footnote-2) and then follows up that answer from Jesus with the question, “And who is my neighbor?”[[3]](#footnote-3) To this Jesus tells this story we know so well and says, “go and do likewise.” That is Jesus’ message to us too as disciples and stewards.

Let’s face it. We probably know this story from the Gospel of Luke better than any, other than the Christmas and Easter stories, and maybe the Feeding of the 5,000. It’s a story we have heard time and time again if we have grown up in the faith- from Sunday School to Confirmation, to years and years, and decades of living and serving as a disciple. So it might be a curious story to hear and think about generosity through. But when I hear this story, that’s precisely what I think about.

***Parables, Stories, and Lessons***

Jesus tells parables and stories to teach, and open the eyes of God’s people. Today’s story he offers as his version of an answer to the question of “who is my neighbor?” We know how the story goes, it needs little unpacking. But the truth about parables in general is that they are stories, with layers and layers of possible meanings and lessons. That’s why we can easily all come to the same conclusion as the lawyer saying that the one who was neighbor to the one in need was the Samaritan, the “one who showed him mercy.”[[4]](#footnote-4) But what else might this story tell us?

Perhaps it offers us a chance to witness God’s creative, redeeming, healing, and reconciling work happening among God’s people. For it is a Samaritan, a foreigner if you will, in this story who sees their fellow sibling in Christ in need, and doesn’t just see the need, he then makes the move to respond. Showing that it’s not always only people that act, think, or look like someone who help each other, but that all of these differences are transcended in God’s kingdom. For what is more important, is our shared identity as children of God.

***God is the Generous One in the Story and Our Story***

It's when we understand this, that we start to sense God’s generosity at work. Our God is a generous God. We all know it’s true. Just look at our confessions or creeds. We proclaim what God has done, that which God alone could do to overcome death and the grave, and why and for what? For you and for me. For the sake of all of God’s beloved, out of God’s deep abiding, abundant, and generous love. Period.
There’s nothing we could do to ever earn or warrant such a generous move. But that’s just who God is. Generous. Generous in mercy, like Jesus talks about painting a beautiful picture of a Samaritan who sees another in need, and doesn’t turn his head, but steps up. Generous in presence and accompaniment. Generous in giving- as the Samaritan goes out of his own way to make sure the man in need is cared for, and provided for through the promise of financial compensation, the very offering of denarii.[[5]](#footnote-5) The same sort of coins we hear about elsewhere in the gospels- like where a widow gives her only money for the sake of God’s work.

This generosity stems from the very basic identity of who God is. God is Generous. The psalmist proclaims that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it…”[[6]](#footnote-6) Put another way, the psalmist is reminding us that the earth is God’s, and all who inhabit it- you, me, your neighbors, and those all around the world are God’s too, as are everything that makes them who they are. Simply, if you take the psalmist to their logical conclusion, all that we have and all that we are, are God’s. And that matters.

It begs the question then, why do we have what we have? Why do we have passions, strengths, gifts, questions, ideas, dreams, hopes, vocations, assets… the list goes on. But all of these and so much more that makes us each the unique child of God that we are, are entrusted to our care by God. God does so out of God’s deep generosity, and desire to be in relationship with all of God’s own beloved. Calling us to know God, to give thanks and praise, and then join with God, in God’s kingdom building work in some way through the fruits of the spirit- like generosity and all the others that Paul writes about.

***God’s Promises for You***

The generosity of God in the story about the Samaritan and the neighbor in need, also reminds us of God’s presence and promises. God shows up for God’s own. Just like the psalmist says elsewhere about the Lord being my shepherd and walking even with God’s own through the valley of the shadow of death. Or, as we are reminded by the words of Ruth, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”[[7]](#footnote-7) This move from Ruth embodies God’s promise to be present with God’s own. In the ups and downs of life. When life is going well, and not well, like it was for the man on the side of the road.

Jesus tells this story too, perhaps because he knows what lies ahead. He knows that the cross looms large, and that all signs point to Jerusalem. He also knows that, at least at this point, the disciples aren’t ready to comprehend fully what this means. The lawyer as wise as he is who has found Jesus on the road, who knows the meaning of the commandments and the Shema, that, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself,” and recognizes that this sort of life is the life that leads to life eternal.[[8]](#footnote-8)
But even if he knows that, whether to justify himself or to comprehend, he doesn’t understand how broad and deep a command this is. So Jesus tells this parable for him, for the disciples, and for all who have ears to listen. In doing so, he’s inviting us also to see a glimpse of God’s promises of being “for you.” Those two simple words like we might hear in the sacraments, “for you.” God does what God does, “for you.” The body and the blood are given and shed, “for you.” That is a most generous move to offer God’s self for God’s own. And it’s a generosity grounded in a love that transcends our human conceptions and capabilities to understand.

***God Invites Us to Respond as the Spirit Moves***

I think Jesus knows that it’s hard to comprehend all this. So he gives us story after story, and invites us to see ourselves in them. I wonder, are we the man in need of care on the side of the road? Are we the robbers? The priest in a hurry? The Levite who for fear of his own safety, can’t be bothered? The Samaritan who stops and does what he can? However we might identify, or with whomever we might identify as, Jesus invites us to imagine and to respond.

Generosity and stewardship really is all about living a life of faithful gratitude, in joyful response for all that God has done and continues to do. Because after all, we can’t earn or deserve any of it. But God entrusts us with all that we have, and invites us to be part of it. The Samaritan in this story seems to live it. It’s real in him. And generosity begets generosity.[[9]](#footnote-9)

I wonder, who by witnessing the Samaritan’s actions might then have been generous in some ways to others too? Or think about the stranger in a coffee or drive-thru line who pays it forward by paying for the person or car behind them’s order. Perhaps that’s a sign of the Samaritan’s generosity on display too.

I can’t help but imagine the Samaritans who have shown up in my life, and in the life and story of my own family. This is something that we in the Nebraska Synod have a resource for called the 4G Network- “Growing God’s Generous Generations,” which invites all the disciples of the Nebraska Synod to join in, in the shared work of generosity, cross+generational ministry, discipleship, faith formation, and stewardship.[[10]](#footnote-10) This work often revolves around stories, and especially the stories of being in relationship with people of different generations.

***A Story about a man named Jim***

Today I’m thinking about a man I knew in my hometown in Washington state, named Jim. Jim passed away a number of years ago now, and I only knew him late in his life. But I remember hearing stories of how Jim had grown up in the deep south, and served in the army. After his service, he ended up meeting his sweetheart Lorraine and together they ended up in the Seattle area. He ended up having a long career managing a local grocery store, and through that, got to know so many people in my hometown, and the town got to know him too.

I didn’t know Jim when he was in the grocery business, only after he had long retired. But I had heard stories of how he had created jobs for people who needed them, including my uncles while they were in school. That he found a way to always create more opportunity, and with what he had, to share it widely and quietly in the community. He was a steward, and in his own way, a generous philanthropist because he was grateful and wanted to give others a chance to live abundantly as he had. You might say, he was someone who the Spirit had gotten a hold of, and generosity was central to his spiritual life.

Jim and his wife Lorraine also later helped my parents, when they were two young adults at the time wanting to start a family. They helped my mom and dad be able to afford a down payment on their home. They didn’t need to do this, but offered it because they saw in my parents, two people starting out whom they could help without strings attached. For me, and for my wife Allison, we experienced this generosity first hand through the way Jim helped support us in our seminary costs, and even generously as we started out as newlyweds. Jim didn’t need to do any of this. But he felt called to do it, and that he had the capacity to help in this way. He believed he was doing some of God’s work.

Though Jim was hard of hearing late in life, no one had a bigger smile on their face. I distinctly remember stopping by his home the last time to visit with him, and finding him in his backyard watering his plants that he loved in his garden. Such a big smile came across his face as Allison and I approached. He loved. He cared. He lived. He served. I asked him, Jim, how are you doing? He said, “I’m doing great. I’m grateful. I’ve lived a full life, and I know that God has called me, just like God has called you.” That’s discipleship. That’s stewardship. That’s the spirit of generosity present in the world. God showed up in, with, for, and through him. There’s no question in my mind.

I am sure you all know of people like Jim in your life. Perhaps one of you is like Jim to others you know? When I think of the fruit of the spirit of generosity, I am so blessed to picture so many people who embody that and have embodied that for me. I hope someday, that maybe I might be like Jim to someone. Because, the joy and gratitude in his face that day when Allison and I went to say thank you, was real. Palpable. And here twelve years later, I can still see it.

***We Are Generous, Because God is Generous***Jim was generous because the God he knew and loved, was generous. We are generous and able to be generous because God is generous. That is the work of the Spirit. That is the work of Christ’s on-going presence and body in the world. That’s the work of God’s kingdom breaking in bit by bit, and showing up in ways we might not expect. Even through the life-saving and life-changing act of a Samaritan, someone of a different ethnicity, coming to the aid of another Child of God. Just because he could. He had the means to do so. And God invited him to act.

Go and do likewise. The Spirit is at work in you. God is at work in you, your congregation, your community, your neighborhood, and all around the world.

Open your eyes to what God might be up to and inviting. For when you do, you might just see more glimpses of God’s life-giving generosity and deep abundant and abiding love at work. Open your ears to listen to what God might be calling. Open your heart to feel the needs of your neighbor, and to respond generously, recognizing that what you have God has entrusted you with for that very purpose and vocation. And open your hands to join in. You are Christ’s hands and feet in the world.

Through you, for you, with you, and in you, God shows up out of God’s deep, abiding, and abundant love. Always. Thank you for being part of God’s on-going work and for responding and serving in all the ways that you do. And most of all, thanks be to God! Amen.

1. Luke 10:37, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luke 10:25, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 10:29, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 10:37, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luke 10:35. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Psalm 24:1, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ruth 1:16, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Luke 10:27, NRSV; quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As Bishop Mike Rinehart said in a presentation at the Nebraska Synod Assembly on 4 June 2022 in Kearney, Nebraska. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See <https://www.nebraskasynod4g.org/> for more, or find and like “Growing God’s Generous Generations- The Nebraska Synod 4G Network” on Facebook. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)