

MESSAGE – Generosity as the Way Forward

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In the last month, we have journeyed with those from long ago who were in exile, those who found themselves in a foreign world, as we looked for those common experiences we share with them in our days and hopefully learning what they learned. If you missed any of those messages and the music and prayers we shared together, they can always be found on our website.

Last week we reflected on the clear message from God to those exiles; a message to seek the welfare of the city...for in the city's welfare, they would find their own.

Such a basic truth no matter the season of life. Yet, at the same time, a hard instruction to follow, especially when we are places of doubt, insecurity, and worry....we tend to turn inward.

Those exiles weren't the only ones tempted to be thinking only of themselves.

Jesus encountered a man one day who was caught up in his own understanding of things and his own destiny.

So he asked Jesus a crucial question about gaining eternal life; he asked it, though he knew God's instructions; he asked it, though he had been following God's instruction. But for some reason, because he either was challenged by Jesus or insecure in his own faith, he nevertheless asked it. And Jesus' answer clearly indicates that the message to the exiles long before was still relevant and applicable.

Let's hear the whole story from Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'¹; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[d]"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

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Jesus teaches so many lessons in this story:

That even when one is following religious rules, you can still miss the point....

That assumptions we make about others are not dependable.

But when we think about who he is teaching – a teacher of the law who was wanting to justify himself....we see that there is the same lesson here that the ancient exiles learned:

- My destiny is tied up with yours.
- I cannot think about my eternal life, without considering the lives of others now.
- I cannot be asking about my own salvation, without remembering that being saved is not just about the future, but it is about how I live my life now toward others.

All of this:

The word to the exiles

Jesus' instruction to the expert in the law

Guides us to understand that generosity is crucial.

A few things about generosity:

- Generosity is what we see depicted by the Samaritan  
Interrupted his own agenda/schedule...he was obviously on his way somewhere  
Had compassion....saw a man in need; a need greater than his own.

Extended himself....despite the risk that the situation could have posed for him.

- Generosity gives us what we are seeking in the first place – what that teacher of the law and the exiles were all seeking: assurance and peace about their future.

**Scientific studies show that giving back or showing kindness and generosity can have major impacts on our health, including:**

- reduced blood pressure,
- reduced stress and anxiety
- improved mood,
- improved immune system and.
- increased sense of purpose.

And it seems it doesn't work the other way....to seeking one's own welfare alone. As a matter of fact, I wonder if it has the opposite result....

Ever wonder about that priest and Levite?

I know they are simply characters in a story Jesus told, - or are they?

Where are they in their spirit after they pass by the man in need?

My guess: feeling bad and having to expend a lot of energy justifying their non-action to themselves

I know I've done that when I've passed by someone seeking help on the side of the road with my window rolled up and looking the other way.....

Perhaps they don't have peace of mind.

Perhaps they spiral inward in defense of themselves.

These are days in which we find ourselves seeking the way through some hard times.

The way of generosity offers us a path –

And the way of generosity actually draws us closer to God's own heart.

Generosity connects us to God's own heart

Through salvation history, we see God:

Providing for his children – like with manna in the wilderness

Giving instruction so that we can know what is good pleasing to God – like with the law

Forgiving sins – like with David

Giving second and third chances – like with Jonah

Giving his own self – that we see in Jesus death and resurrection.