

Texts: Psalm 51:6-9; Matt. 6: 19-34

Subject: Do Not Worry

Theme: All This Stuff

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, August 15, 2021; *Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today is the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - the season in the church where we are reminded of the Spirit's power in our lives. The Holy Spirit is with us, leading, preserving, sustaining and transforming us all the time. One of the ways I've seen the Spirit at work in the world and in my life is through the generosity of the faithful people around me. When I was growing up, our family didn't always have the newest vehicle, the latest toys and gadgets, or the nicest clothes. There were times when my grandparents helped us out, gave gifts, and took us kids places that were memorable and meaningful. As a boy scout, I learned about helping others, giving where I was able, and making a difference in the community. In school, I had mentors that supported me, who were generous with their time, and connected me to resources to help get me to college. Family members and the community I lived in taught me about the value of being generous, and those who invested in me showed me what it looks like to live a generous life.

Who modeled that behavior for you?

We try to teach our kids to take care of their things, and not keep more than they need. We've got *all this stuff* crammed into closets and spilling out onto dresses and desks. Over that last couple of weeks we've been once again going through books and folders and toys and gadgets and things we just don't need anymore. A couple of times a year we fill bags and boxes with toys and clothes and bring them to Martin's Mart or

Savers. We share hand me downs with other families, and gently used baby items with the new parents we know. The kids sometimes have a hard time parting with things they value most. Each little rock and stick becomes a treasure to them. We're always learning, and trying to make room in our homes and in our hearts for what really matters.

Jesus' sermon on the mount includes teaching about how to live in the kingdom. He's talking about the things that matter most, and caring for others and providing for the needs of those nearest to us are at the top of the list. The kind of love he's asking people to show, is over and above what they might be expected to do according to the law. It's a sacrificial kind of giving. But more than that it's about arranging priorities in the proper order. In his book, *Giving to God*, Mark Allan Powell notes that **If our true treasure is the Lord, we will give as an act of worship. We will give as an act of faith. We give as a spiritual discipline.**¹ We will give not because God needs what we have, but because we want to be givers, just as God is a generous giver to us. Look at what God has given us just today: a world of beauty, the breath in our lungs, health, sight, friends and family, a place to gather, ways to communicate, transportation, hope, joy, peace, love - *all this stuff* and more!

But how many here are totally free of worries?

It's easy to get anxious when we can't get what we want on time, or to think we're entitled to a certain standard of living. We can get anxious and store up too much - we call it hoarding. We can even become paranoid about the future. We are full of unfounded worries. Yes bad things happen at times, but Powell writes that trust is an

¹ Mark Allan Powell, *Giving to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006)

antidote to stress and anxiety...and a defense against greed. When we trust in God's continued generosity and benevolence, and this trust yields contentment.²

We may not all worry about what we will eat or drink. Though preparing school lunches for four kids last week causes me to consider what they will eat or drink, but that's different. Most of us know where our next meal will come from. Most of us have clothing. But we might worry about having enough or of having the latest and greatest, the fanciest, or the most things. There have been times in my life when I wanted something and just couldn't afford it. When I living in Los Angeles twenty years ago now, I went through a divorce. I needed to find a place to live and a friend invited me to stay with him for a while. After a few days, he decided he didn't want a roommate, and I had to rush to find a place. I found this little one-bedroom apartment on the Westside, with a garden courtyard. It was not much to look at. I can't imagine what it rents for now. I think I had a bed and not much else. I was able to secure a couch and some furniture - from the local dumpster, and I was grateful to get it. It was a time in my life when I found my self praying again after a long hiatus. Things got better.

Our culture teaches us that we need more stuff. Easy access to credit cards and emails touting online shopping deals, and made up holidays like Black Friday and Cyber Monday turn our attention to gathering more stuff. It's become the national pastime.

We have *all this stuff* and yet we can still be lured into a mindset that says what we have is not enough. This is the kind of thinking Jesus is teaching against. As we practice generosity, we realize that we have more than we even know. When we fully trust God to provide for our needs, we can give sacrificially as an act of thanksgiving, as

² Powell, 90.

worship, and faithfully and cheerfully give from our abundance. And we realize that we have so many gifts to share!

We have gifts of creativity, gifts of joy, gifts of encouragement, gifts of perseverance and life experience. Your passion for serving is a gift. Your musical talent is a gift. Your own unique perspective is a gift that you get to share.

All this stuff - gifts that God gives us because God loves us so much. God gives more generously than we could ever ask for or imagine. God even gave His dear Son for us, to live and walk and die for us, and raised Him up for us. He forgives us when we fail to live generously, and continues to call us back to him, so that we would believe, and trust, and love one another in His name.

This congregation exists as a result of generosity, and for the purpose of being generous. Over 70 years ago, folks moving out West decided they needed to build a Lutheran church and eventually pooled together resources to purchase the land we are on today. They gave of what they had to create the Katherine Center, dedicated to serving our neighbors in need, supported immigrant families from Vietnam, and provided food and clothing for children and seniors. They taught ESL classes, hosted youth camp and choirs, and responded to immediate needs here in our valley. We continue in that tradition today. Even as we are challenged by a global pandemic, we give to support families at Christmas time with the Angel Tree, gather supplies for students and new mothers, support the mission of Lutheran Social Services, and partner with Family Promise. The Spirit leads us to serve.

Of course there are countless ways we can be generous. You have been generous with time and attention, your acts of service to the church and our neighbors,

generous with prayer and in sharing your faith. You have been generous with your own families and the service organizations you support. You have given to support this congregation and the mission we share.

God has been generous to us. As a faithful response, we trust in the Lord to provide at all times. We believe and share from our abundance and the hope that is in us. We give thanks for a generous God who continues to transform us by the Holy Spirit. We seek first the kingdom, knowing that *all this stuff* we carry has always belonged to God, and so do we.

Amen.