

Sermon: What God wants from Us

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Text: You will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Luke 14:14

Christian Ko Choi

August 28, 2022

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

## Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Today's first Scripture reading comes from Hebrews, Chapter 13, verses one through eight followed by verses 15 and 16. As we prepare to hear the last chapter of Hebrews, the author is encouraging and reminding all of us to be steadfast in our faith and in loving others. Listen for the Word of the Lord.

<sup>1</sup>Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup>Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.<sup>3</sup>Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. <sup>4</sup>Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. <sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." <sup>6</sup>So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

<sup>7</sup>Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

<sup>15</sup>Through Jesus, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup>Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Amen.

Our Gospel reading for today comes from Luke chapter 14, verses 1 and 7 through 14. After healing a man who had dropsy in front of the Pharisees and the lawyers, Jesus goes on and shares with them this wisdom that goes much deeper than a lesson of humility. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

<sup>1</sup>On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

<sup>7</sup>When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup>"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup>and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place', and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher!'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup>For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

<sup>12</sup>He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Please join me in a prayer. Loving God, thank you for being our Heavenly Father providing grace and patience. As we take steps to understand more of who you are, would you soften our hearts and quiet down our inner thoughts so that we may hear your voice echoing from deep within this morning. Maybe the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Once in a while, there are things that I see as a younger person that brings much hope and warmth to my heart and in my life as I check off errands or take a moment of leisure. It can be seeing the beauty of God's creation that cannot be recaptured by any human means. No image that is taken through a lens or finest paintings that displays the emotions of the artist through vivid colors can ever fully capture the awesome power of God's love displayed for all to see. Sometimes it can be as simple as seeing an elderly couple holding their hands, enjoying each other's company. It seems that I subconsciously connect to 1 Corinthians 13 in my head to that moment; Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude... it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

When I asked couples what their secret was to have that kind of relationship, the couples that I knew as well as the strangers often gave same the advice; We know what the other wants and likes, and they love them for who they are.

God continues to court us through the wonderful displays of nature and small miracles in our lives. God continues to woo us and continues to hear the smallest whispers of our hearts in prayers, knowing every heartache, struggles, and worries as well as the things that bring us happiness, joy, and hope. God knows us so intimately, and yet have we given notice to God's love for us lately? What does God want from us in our relationship? It is

my hope to pay attention to these questions today and next week to strengthen our bond with God.

In today's gospel message, people were interested in Jesus, either wanting to hear a great advice from a rabbi while others were listening for a way to trap him. Then Jesus shared a very practical wisdom and a lesson in humility. You see, back then, it was all about the status and which class you belonged in. Everyone was measuring themselves to another to see where they fit, and it was on full display at a banquet. Higher importance and status meant that one got to sit closer to the host. If one was not, you sat further away from the host. For some odd reason, I picture a banquet like Lord's Supper painting with an extraordinary long table. If the food flowed from the center of the table with the host and gets passed down towards the ends, can you imagine what the food was like at the end of the table? I know what happened at the dinner table with a family of 4 boys growing up. There is a reason why my youngest brother is also the shortest. I do not want to imagine what it would be like for the least important person who sat near the ends at the banquets back then.

The wisdom that Jesus shares is that as the host walks towards the center of the table, one can gain much honor not only from the host but from also everyone by being asked to sit closer to me at the banquet. A little humility goes a long way. Although it is a good advice, Jesus would not be Jesus without being radical and ruffling few Pharisees along the way. In today's passage, it just happens to be the leader of pack, who was hosting this dinner party. I am sure that Jesus knew that Pharisees did not like him much. Maybe it was the leader's way of trying to find some compromise with this rebel rouser who was having a following that was causing trouble for them. This was surely not a practical thing to do when you want to make a friend. Yet Jesus told the leader that when he throws a party, he should not invite people like him as well as his friends, but to invite the people who cannot pay you back; the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind - those who can only share about the good thing that has been done to them and simply tell others just like themselves.

We are not too far removed from this story. I would love to say that the time and the society has evolved to honor all. But would we be inclined to invite a stranger to our dinners or parties? How often would we share our blessings with them? This advice reminds us of the normalcy that we live in. We still live in a norm where people are divided and categorized for who they are. Unbeknownst to us, we are afraid of inviting and opening our dinner tables and our hearts to strangers or others who are not like we are. Those who are hungry and sick, lost and outcasts, widows and orphans, weary and burdened, those with different political affiliations, or different religions, or different social stances, or those who do not serve any of our interest, are we ready to welcome them into our homes, our hearts, our faith, and our lives? This radical love that God has for us, God wants us to share it in a radical way with one another. It is Jesus who said, 'as you

did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me',<sup>1</sup> yet we often think that is something we can turn on and off at our own desire, unlike the beauty of God's creation being displayed for us each day to marvel at to know that God's love is steadfast.

When things are not steadfast in our own lives and do not go our way, sometimes we are quick to ask God, 'why have you not answered my prayers,' 'why are you not heeding to the cries of my heart' like a person in relationship complaining about their treatment from others when they don't meet our expectations. Yet, if we carefully reflect back with 20/20 hindsight, we see that we have never been alone, that God has been taking every step with us along the way. Jesus wants us to follow him into a more redemptive purpose in our relationships. Have we thought about how we loved and served the least of these, which is our way of speaking the love language that God welcomes in God's heart? In God's kingdom, God's economy has been never about the wealth and money but sharing the various blessings that we have that is from the Lord and using it to the fullest to bring hope, joy, and happiness in others. We have been called a holy nation and set apart to be the catalyst for others to talk about the good in the world, that there are still those who are kind, who rejoices in the truth, who still believes that love can bear all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, to know that love never ends, and it never fails. Jesus wants us to bless others and how we carry out our actions matters to God. Rather than befriending someone and using them for our own benefit, God simply asks us to love one another just as we love God and love ourselves, regardless of who they might be, for they too are cherished by God as sons and daughters of God.

Rather than asking what has been done for me or to me or what good has been in my life this week, we should be asking, 'have I put a little love in my heart for others and how should I serve them so there might be joy, hope and happiness that this world would never know yet only comes from the Holy Spirit who has Created us, Sustains us, and Walks with us each moment?' Isn't that what God wants from us exactly to do? To bring good news to the world by doing justice, loving kindness, and walk humbly with our God who has the first love for each one of us? Let us do exactly that. And that is what God expects and wants from us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 25:40