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Weekend of Sunday, August 7, 2022
9th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 19/Year C

First Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:32-40

Sermon Title: “Live Generously & Shine Out!”

Theme

Jesus says, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” It is God’s promise from the beginning—to Abraham, to the early church, and to the “little flock” of which we are a part in today’s assembly. Faith, God’s baptismal gift, trusts the promises of God. Have no fear.

Texts:

First Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ²But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By

faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

¹³All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Gospel: Luke 12:32-40

[Jesus said:] ³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

³⁹“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Sermon

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

This beloved passage comes in the middle of a long dialogue that begins, it could be argued, way back in chapter 11. The conversation started with the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to pray. That was the Gospel Reading on July 24th. Then Luke continued with a story (11:14-23) about Jesus casting out a demon. In that story, Jesus had to defend himself because his accusers thought he was a minion of Beelzabul – another name for Satan.

Then Luke recorded that the crowds began to grow bigger and Jesus told them the story of Jonah and Nineveh. You may recall in that story (11:29-32) from the OT, that the prophet Jonah was sent by God to the pagan city of Nineveh to preach a message of repentance and return to the one true God. And he was further instructed to tell the Ninevites that if they didn’t heed his warnings God was going to bring massive destruction upon them. As the story goes, they did and God didn’t.

Well, Jesus told the crowd of Jews that on the last day it will be the people of Nineveh who will stand up and bring judgment against them! And to add further insult, he said, speaking of himself, *“something greater than Jonah is here!”* In other words, the pagan Ninevites got the message and it was only by the prophet Jonah! The Jews have Jesus, God’s own Son, in their presence trying to bring them to repentance and they still don’t get it.

Do you sense the rhetoric ramping up?

He then chastised them a little bit more with the text (11:33-36) from which we get the song, “This Little Light of Mine.” And though it is a cute children’s song that we love to sing, the text is rather angry. Jesus said, *“Once you have God’s light in you, it ought to do what light does, namely shine out. No one lights a light and then puts it under a basket. Light is intended to illuminate; to shine out, to bring light to darkness. But you who have heard the good news, are trying to put it out!”*

A little more tension.

Then some Pharisees ask him to dinner (11:37-12:12). Why? I don't know. Haven't they been paying attention to Jesus' tone? He's getting increasingly hostile. Now, I have bad days too. And if you happen to encounter me on one of those bad days and you sense it, please don't extend the invitation! Furthermore, if you do, I more than likely will politely (I hope) decline the invitation so I do not embarrass myself or you any further. But not so with Jesus and this group of Pharisees in this situation. He accepted the invitation and then commenced to call them "fools" and says, "Woe to you..."

Well, there are some lawyers at the dinner party and upon witnessing this berating they interrupt Jesus and said,

Luke 11:45-46

^{45b} "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too." ⁴⁶ And he said, "Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them."

It is right after this that Luke very perceptively records:

Luke 11:52-12:1

⁵³ When he went outside, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him and to cross-examine him about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

Duh!

Remember how in the Gospels we always hear about how perceptive Jesus was? He instinctively knew the condition of the hearts of his listeners. Remember that? Well, that knowledge didn't stop him from proceeding as he had been. The crowd continued to grow and Jesus continued his attack against those that the culture traditionally looks up to as religious leaders.

After failing to win friends and influence people at the dinner party, Jesus left. But while the party was going on, the word got around that something was happening that simply shouldn't be missed. Luke wrote that a crowd was gathering that numbered in the thousands. So many so that they trampled on one another to get to him and hear what he had to say. Remember, he was attacking the very ones they

had learned to look up to for leadership. This was very disconcerting for some, and confusing for others.

Then we have the Gospel Reading from last weekend about the man who wanted Jesus to arbitrate a dispute between him and his brother regarding an estate. Jesus used him as an example when he taught them that they were pursuing things that have no real lasting value. It is the things of God that will last and pay dividends beyond human comprehension. That discussion continued with an exhortation to not worry about such earthly things as food and clothing and creature comforts.

So leading up to today, we have a long series of what I sense were angry dialogues and frustrated rants. *“You people don’t get it and I am about to pull my hair out, you make me so crazy.”*

And then, Jesus seemed to collect himself and reminded himself who he is and began our Gospel Reading for today.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now if I had not taken the time to set the stage for you, that little reading would have had a whole different tenor, wouldn’t it? But now, knowing more about whom Jesus was talking to and what led up to this beautiful little piece, we are ready to learn from Jesus.

Jesus said, and I paraphrase, *“You’ve got it all wrong. It’s all wrong! I see that I am going to have to start from scratch with you. Do not worry about these things that trouble you. The Pharisees and the scribes are spending their lives worrying about useless and godless minutia and are missing the message of God’s love. They teach you this junk and it puts you into a tailspin of hopelessness. And you who are concerned about your personal wealth and one-sided justice aren’t seeing the bigger picture. There is a far greater treasure at stake here and you fuss over some petty earthly property.*

But I tell you, have no fear little flock. My Father and your Father, the one that others have told half-truths about, let me tell you about who he really is. He is so benevolent, so all-loving, so forgiving and so desiring of your love and attention that he wants to give you his kingdom.

Imagine the kingdom of God. Imagine what splendor that must be like. All that is yours. And our Father has a big smile on his face as he offers it to you. So don't sweat this small stuff. You want to be sure you get your share of your parent's estate!?! You need to get your arms around the big picture. Apply yourself to things that are godly and plan to live in the generosity of God."

Now, I entitled this sermon, "Living Generously" and I'll bet many of you thought that I was going to preach about living your lives giving generously to the plight of others. If you thought that, there is some truth in that thinking.

I do believe that that is what Jesus meant when he talked about making purses for ourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. I do believe that Jesus is calling us to live lives of service and give generously to others out of our blessedness.

But that is not what I meant when I entitled this sermon, "Live Generously & Shine Out!" I was thinking of the other side of that coin. We who have seen the light and claim it as our own, we who have heard this message and understand, we who have learned the lesson that Jesus taught 2000 years ago and believe in his promises, we ought to "Live Generously & Shine Out!"

A few years ago at a Christian leadership conference, I was blessed to see and hear Jimmy Carter. Yea, laugh if you must, many consider him a failure as a president. But I tell you, he was raised to be a Christian and for virtually his whole life he has lived according to Christian principles. While other former presidents commit themselves to golf and the lecture circuit, he pounds nails for Habitat for Humanity – doesn't run it or speak out for it, he pounds nails for it. And offers his considerable diplomacy skills to causes that the rest of the world neglects; poverty, hunger, and justice, at no charge. That is what I mean by "Live Generously & Shine Out!"

And then there was Richard Curtis, a name that is probably unfamiliar to all of you as it was to me. Curtis is a prolific screenwriter, producer and director for film and television. You will know his work through *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and *Notting Hill* and the Mr. Bean television series. I am not even sure he considers himself a Christian, yet he surfaced at one of the world's largest Christian leadership conferences because he is the co-founder of such efforts as the "Make Poverty History" campaign, and probably his best-known effort in the US, "American Idol Gives Back". Through those selfless efforts, he gets famous people to donate time to raise awareness and money toward eradicating extreme poverty and treatable diseases. He is a highly successful man but he would measure his wealth by the difference he has made in the world. He considers himself most blessed and that is what I mean by "Live Generously & Shine Out."

In Richard Curtis was a guy who admits he hasn't got the faith thing figured out, but goes out and does these incredibly Christian things, raising billions of dollars, that's billions with a "b", simply because he senses it's the right thing to do. I am sure that that sense is the spirit of God even if he doesn't have the spiritual maturity to discern it for himself.

Jesus might ask us, *"If my child Richard Curtis, who doesn't know me, does these great things that are close to my heart, then why don't you? You who have faith in me, who will inherit our Father's kingdom, why don't you "Live Generously & Shine Out?"*

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Brothers and sisters in Christ, by adoption and not by flesh, members of the family of faith, forget about the property and the money and the keeping score. That was the message Jesus was trying to teach. There is a bigger prize to be considered and we who believe, have already won it! The game is not over yet, but the winner has already been determined, and guess what? We win! Therefore we can and ought to live generously now and let our faith in Jesus shine out, for we have been blessed to be a blessing for others.

Prayer

Lord God, help us to not be dazzled by these little stones we spend millions of dollars to mine so that we can wear them on our fingers. Help us not hoard money when we could be using it to make a difference in the world. But more than anything else today, we pray that you would touch us with your generosity, remind us of your grace and love and charity toward us, so that we may live out our lives as examples of your generosity poured out on us. Inspire us to "Live Generously & Shine Out," so that others may come to know your generosity. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen