

WELCOME 5th September 2021 – 15 Pentecost '21 B

Father's Day! – 2 Corinthians 3:16-4:18

Welcome! It's great to be together. As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources for you to use *over the course of the week*. As God leads you into the fullness of His word/work in your life he will then introduce you to someone who needs to hear the good news from you. Also... somewhere here today you may feel a nudge - tap - tug. Don't ignore it! That's probably the Holy Spirit prompting you some way. Let's talk about that after worship. Happy Father's Day!

As we move into this week... Nobody wants to be thought of as stingy, but what does it mean to be generous? Is it simply random acts of giving toward whatever cause or need that grabs your attention? Is it the political philanthropy of Bill Gates & Bono? Is it saving up for that once a year splurge for your favourite charity?

When it's clear **we** are some of the most blessed people to ever walk the planet... We have more & have access to more than ever before in human history... What does it mean to be generous?

Generosity is not just about finances, but it **IS** about finances... It is about our time, our energies, our wisdom, our skills & gifts... most importantly it's about our hearts.

Authentic Generosity is an expression of grace that flows from the blessings we have received. Authentic Generosity comes from a heart that's been embraced by the Father's love in Jesus & equipped by the Spirit to support the work of God's people in ever-expanding ways.

*We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus,
will also raise us with Jesus & present us to himself together with you.*

In the fragile temporary abundance of this life, we live toward an assured eternity w/ the Father in the arms of His Son. God's present lavishness & his gift of an eternal abundance of joy & love can produce in us a generosity that imitates his. Authentic Generosity is how we embody the self-giving of Jesus in all we do; & becoming authentically generous is a joyful transformation of our hearts/lives that never ends.

We'll experience & share that together. Let's pray... then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Heavenly Father, God of compassion, in this unrelenting season of isolation, be close to those who are ill, afraid or quarantined. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope; in their darkness, be their light. We ask those same gifts from your hand to each of us: consolation, hope, light, release from this panic that has beset your good world. We pray through him who suffered alone on the cross, but reigns with you in glory, and for us has overcome the world, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let's hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. When you are the receiver of a generous act or gift, how do you respond? Why?
2. When are you most tempted to be anxious about your earthly needs? Why then? What do you do?
3. What hinders a person's generosity?

15 Pentecost – '21 B – AUTHENTIC GENEROSITY: FOUNDATION OF GENEROSITY

Wednesday nights during lockdown have become “Arts/Culture Night” in our home. We use Wed evenings to access something other than free-TV or movies. A week ago it was a performance by the Bangara Dance Theatre – beautiful...stunning... beautifully stunning. This week it was Archibald Prize finalists. We went to the website & pretended we were in a gallery studying the final 52 works up to win the big prize. We each had our own “prize winning” favourites that of course didn't win.

Aside from a pretty engaging way to get through this season of stolen freedom; I was once again reminded that the 21st century Western world is bathed in affluence. Almost all the finalists noted in the written description of their work some grumble about being unable to leave their studios. The lockdown is cramping their style since most of them are Sydney-based artists...But **938** submissions are sufficient to tell me they're still working. A big chunk of our workforce isn't. But it hit me hard...We sat comfortably in our lounge room eating our fill dressed up some to fit the “art gallery” theme...Internet. Electricity. TV. Clean sheets on our soft beds & \$\$ in the bank... Did I mention bathed in affluence? We have met the enemy & he is us. - *Pogo*

In fact, depending on who you ask or which measure you use: if you have a fixed address, a roof over your head & only 1 family living under it, running water, flush toilets...I won't get into internet access or a car to call your own...you are in the upper percentile of all people alive right now. We are the 1%. I don't say that as an insult...or to stir up some misguided sense of guilt...but objective reality. We are the 1%.

Let's throw this in too...*none of this*...is essential. None of it. I don't just mean me. I don't just mean you. None of this, this reality we take in/enjoy every moment every day, is necessary. As folks who acknowledge God as Creator, we also have to acknowledge: God did not **HAVE TO** create. The Father was **IN NO WAY OBLIGATED** to utter that first “*Let there be light*...& certainly not “*Let us make humankind in our image*.” In the grand scheme of the universe; the universe **DOES NOT HAVE TO BE**. From the sun shining in my window to the fuzzy hatchling plovers out in the nature reserve behind our house...from the most distant star our telescopes can detect to the smallest cell at the bottom of the ocean...none of it is necessary. **EXCEPT** as an overflow of the Father's essential nature...God is love & grace. God is faithful & generous...

In a few weeks I'll spend more time on these words: “I believe God has created me & all that exists. He has given & still preserves my body & soul & all their powers. He provides me with food & clothing, home & family, daily work & all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger & guards me from every evil. All this God does out of fatherly & divine goodness & mercy though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely out to thank praise serve & obey him. This is most certainly true.” I want simply to point to that

spot on grasp of God's gracious provision & sustaining/protecting love...Not only do you & I swim in the river of 21st century Western affluence...We exist in the much wider deeper ocean of the Father's generous goodness & grace. All this God does out of fatherly & divine goodness & mercy though I do not deserve it. I. DO. NOT. DESERVE. IT.

It couldn't be clearer...everything that *IS*; is the overflow of the Father's essential nature...God is love & grace. God is faithful & abundantly generous...AND from that essence – character – from the very center of who God is...God provides & sustains all that *IS* necessary for our lives & our flourishing. God has given us a durable & resilient home spun amongst the planets & stars. God provides a world of wonder & variety & beauty. Delicate harmony. Perfect balance. Abundantly flourishing in good. We kid ourselves into believing we understand the mysteries & majesties of the universe. We tell ourselves the lie of mastery & control. We live the illusion that it all depends on us & we must shift the levers of power manipulate the forces of nature or we're doomed...He has given & still preserves...He (not me/we)...It is in fact our dishonesty our faulty fake wisdom...our lies & illusions that paint life in very different strokes for us. We tell ourselves we really don't have enough. We see the world as limited & our part of it under threat. We create a worldview of scarcity & fear. It is replayed in the nightly news & daily political press briefings.

As Paul writes to the church in Corinth...he wants to make sure those illusions don't get a foothold...Corinth has not been a happily ever after ministry. They struggled... w/ Paul w/ understanding the gospel in full w/ one another w/ the implications the *what does this mean* of following Jesus in his gift of life & grace & forgiveness. So Paul is preparing to visit them again...to reground them in Christ's life & love & power...but ^b/₄ he does he wants to set the stage for what they must know...what we must know I'm going to work backwards through 2 Cor 4...then put it back in order

vs 14...*We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us w/ Jesus & present us to himself together w/ you.* In a nutshell...The future is secure. There is nothing on the horizon hiding in the shadows waiting to destroy you that you need to worry about. Your destiny is rock solid in the presence of the Father in the arms of the Son. vss 16-18 *That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small & won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them & will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.*

You & I are assured...Death will take us but death will not keep us. Author Pat Conroy writes in his book *South of Broad*: Death lives in each one of us & begins its countdown on our birthdays & makes its rough entrance at the last hour & the perfect time.

I forget who said it...heard it a million x: We are all born dying. We are born saying hello, & the rest of life is one long goodbye. But "goodbye" is not the last word. The Father raised Jesus from death so that w/ Jesus we too would be raised to life w/ him forever. The future is secure. Paul doesn't trivialize earthly pain/heartache/death. His scars bear witness to real life pain...just like ours do; but what Paul is saying is that our perspective on our earthly troubles changes based on where we focus our attention. Like the lens of a skilled photographer...we fix our sights on the unseen future reality that Christ has already secured for us so the relative size of our current difficulty/pain fades from view. *In comparison, it is small & won't last long...light & momentary.* Rom 8:18, "what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later."

The future is secure. There is nothing on the horizon hiding in the shadows waiting to jump out & gobble you up take you down & as long as my energy my focus my attention my living is shaped by that reality...I can also live trusting Rom 8:28: *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God & are called according to his purpose for them.* Everything in God's hands is used in my life to draw me closer to him, to cause my life to flourish by his grace & reflect his goodness grace & glory to the people around me. BECAUSE OF **THAT** REALITY...

The present is blessed by Christ's presence & strength...*We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.* These statements describe the true condition of believers in the world. They are true, even though our experience of them varies. These circumstances don't arise every day...but some days they do. No one is exempt.

But here's the truth...here's where we find Christ at work in us in our circumstances: Sometimes we are puzzled & perplexed by life. Sometimes we are bewildered & unsure. Sometimes we are under pressure because of our trust in Jesus when others around us don't share that faith...That's okay. But we are not crushed, driven to despair, abandoned, or destroyed because life doesn't depend on our knowledge of the big picture or our capacity to come up w/ answers to every dilemma the world faces. When we are at our wit's end, God is just getting started. Often he has to wait until we have given up completely...When we are confused, Jesus is not. When we're feeling the pressure of just getting through the day...Jesus is unfazed. "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

The future is secure. The present is blessed by Christ's presence & strength **AND** We are being transformed by those 2 realities & in that transformation we are led away from scarcity & fear & into generosity that mirrors that of the Father.

For the Lord is the Spirit, & wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see & reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more & more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. How does that transformation take place? You're not going to like the answer...See we love it that the Spirit has taken hold & opened our eyes to the reality of Christ's life given for us & his power at work in us & his glory one day growing & radiating in us & we all pray that would happen more quickly please Jesus! vss 10-11 tell us:

Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies.

What we want, of course, is the "life of Jesus;" every one of us wants to be like him. But the power of God is the miracle of others seeing in us, in the midst of our struggle & trial & hardship & pain, the character & disciplined will & faithful obedience & unbreakable joy of Jesus coming out of us in whatever circumstance we are facing. The life of Jesus...being changed into his glorious image in every moment where we turn to God trusting that *Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Rom 8:32*

What does it mean to be generous? French Priest Henri Nouwen writes:

"Generosity cannot come from guilt or pity. It has to come from hearts that are fearless & free & are willing to share abundantly all that is given to us"

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We are uniquely & richly blessed...& in the fragile temporary abundance of this life, we live toward an assured eternity w/ the Father in the arms of His Son. God's present lavishness & his gift of an eternal abundance of joy & love can produce in us a generosity that imitates his. Authentic Generosity is how we embody the self-giving of Jesus in all we do; & becoming authentically generous is a joyful transformation of our hearts/lives that never ends.

Take it home... Where is one place in one way beyond your immediate circle where you can demonstrate radical real generosity in the way God has been generous with you?

30 secs...I'll pray for us to close