

WELCOME 3rd October 2021 – 19 Pentecost '21 B

2 Corinthians 10:7-18 & 12:6-10

(Slides I sent) 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. Seating w/ care...

As we move into this week... By height...by age...by ATAR... by experience or by financial turnover...by land or livestock holding...by Worship attendance...by price or KpL...Since Cain compared God's response to his sacrifice against that of Abel, humans have found infinite means of comparison. Even the apostles debated "greatness."

Me against you. Us against them. This against that. Ford against Holden. Vax/not-vax

The key word...**against**...To compare always presumes antagonism, competition & a superior winners vs losers better vs worse view of the world.

But for followers of Jesus, the only comparison that matters is us measured ^{w/in} the powerful grace of **Christ** working through us to widen the reach of his kingdom. The only measurement that counts is the grace of God working through us in every season, situation & circumstance to make us more like him as his grace through us reaches more & more people. The only standard of attainment & satisfaction is seeing the love of God in Jesus Christ transform lives & claim hearts for him forever.

It is toward **that** end that Paul encourages the church to be generous as the Father is generous in sending his Son to die/rise/reign for us. The **Satisfaction** of embodying a **generosity of spirit in all things** is that **that** perfectly imitates the generosity of God who comes to us in our weakness humility & death to raise us in power glory & life in Christ forever.

"If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."

We'll experience & share that together today.

Let's share Isaiah 12 ...then we'll get stuck into it.

FAITH CHAT:

1. What is one thing you would ask God to take away from you today?
2. How have you seen God's grace at work in you through your weakness?

19 Pentecost – '21 B – AUTHENTIC GENEROSITY: SATISFACTION OF GENEROSITY

Corinth was a tough gig for Paul. You read his letters & you know straight away he & the new followers of Jesus there did not always have an easy relationship. His letters...heartfelt/passionate...reveal the struggle he faced being torn b/t nurturing & fostering their emerging faith in Christ & shaking them 'til their teeth rattled because of their waywardness...rebelliousness...obstinance. While he taught & handed on a living faith in Christ, he also grappled w/ their challenges to his legitimacy as an apostle and their doubting his wisdom & authority. His deep love for them is a love tried by the anguish of seeing them stumble/struggle in trusting him & maturing in Christ.

What's **ALSO** clear is that Paul & those who worked closely w/ him always **kept the** main thing the main thing. *When I first came to you, dear brothers & sisters, I didn't use lofty words & impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. For I decided while I was w/ you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. I came to you in weakness: timid & trembling. And my message & preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.* vs 2 & 5...Paul's clear: I don't care what you think about my greatness just so long as you are taken into the greatness of the crucified/risen/ruling Saviour Jesus Christ. I want you to trust God's power to raise you to eternal life...my power is nothing compared to that. main thing/main thing

But by nearly the next sentence of his 1st letter...Paul is forced to address his critics who think he's nobody compared against Apollos. Key word...**AGAINST**...To compare always presumes antagonism, competition & a superior winners/losers better/worse view of the world. The problem in that kind of comparison, especially when we compare ourselves, How do those comparisons come out? Either we are superior to others, or we're failures in comparison w/ them. Someone always loses.

Paul won't be drawn into **that**...*"When one of you says, "I follow Paul," & another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world? After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts. Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants & the one who waters work together with the same purpose. Both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. You are God's field..."* 1 Cor 3:3-8

Paul rejects the battle of the apostles & points instead to human smallness viewed in the wider light of God's greatness & to human obedience to God's desire for the good news of Jesus to reach the ends of the earth. Rather than Paul **OR** Apollos winning some apostolic X factor, what really counts is God's power working through them in the lives of the Corinthians who now have been drawn to trust Jesus Christ.

Which is precisely where Paul continues to focus in what we read today. **"...our authority builds you up; it doesn't tear you down...we hope your faith will grow so the boundaries of our work among you will be extended. Then we will be able to go preach the Good News in other places far beyond you...** For Paul...being adored by the Corinthians over Apollos or one of the other evangelists is a dog's breakfast. His heartfelt desire is to see them flourish in their faith, widen the reach of their discipleship community & provide a launchpad for him to move farther into the not-yet-evangelized world...Rome...Spain...

Real satisfaction is in the advance of the kingdom...is seeing faith grow beyond you ...not just me getting to heaven or seeing the bills get paid but seeing the 3rd & 4th generation of people w/ whom we share the gospel being claimed by the Holy Spirit & trusting the risen Jesus for all things. **SATISFACTION OF GENEROSITY**...the goal toward which Paul encourages the NT church & us to live open-heartedly open-handedly w/ all of God's gifts to us is so our relationships on all levels to thrive & flourish. We receive & respond – receive & share...faith flourishes & the boundaries of the impact of the gospel expand.

The whole point of being alive is not just to experience God's limitless love in your life now & forever **BUT TO LIVE IT** in an ongoing receive & respond – receive & share relationship of generous love every day of your life. The great tragedy of life is so many people miss out on that daily encounter w/ God's love in Jesus...the great tragedy is **we** can miss out...**we** can squander what God so dearly wants to give & accomplish in us & through us. How? By living lives that are too full of us...We know the expression, "He's full of himself"? Yep...be that & miss out on God's love. Be that & lose the chance at being filled w/ an abundance of hope/joy/love/peace that simply isn't possible anywhere else & is meant to be shared. Be that & the gifts you receive in abundance die like root-bound plants in a pot too small.

In Lk 12...Jesus tells the parable of a farmer whose fields produce over-abundantly & he, flush w/ good fortune, decides to build bigger barns & store his goods away for many-a-year...*eat drink be merry!* At which point God says, **"You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?"** Jesus then turns to the disciples & teaches them that it's foolish to be rich on you & poor toward God...& he points to the birds & flowers & how the Father cares for them & wants to do so in abundance for us...**"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, & he will give you everything you need. So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom."** ("It gives him great pleasure") To make you a part of his uncontested rule & reign...to claim your heart & mine...to embrace & bless & heal & strengthen & save...& through us to do the same in someone else.

But the very next words from Jesus... **Sell** your possessions & give to those in need. *This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will also be.* You see it's not just "give up your stuff" (whether your stuff is financial or ego-centered). It's refocus away from here to those who are out here so someone else can experience God's compassion greatness kindness love & God's generosity through you. Jesus says, keep your life focused on the work the Master has left you...while you wait in faith & hope for what the Father has promised is in store for you.

Mt to Rev NT says, Go "all out" – go broke if need be so someone distant from God can experience God's compassion, God's love, God's mercy & power – saving wonder in Jesus Christ. Jesus calls us to give up anything our hearts cling to on this earth so someone who is not yet part of God's family can hear & experience the good news & be drawn into the arms of Christ's saving love.

Paul knows because it's happened in his life how we live/act shapes who we become. Paul knows the words/thoughts/actions/organization of each day – how we occupy our time – what we protect & defend guard or abandon will shape the sort of people we turn out to be. And when we invest more in the lives of others than we do in ourselves...when we divest ourselves of ourselves it's then that the work of the Holy Spirit becomes visible & powerful. When we empty the suitcase of self...the Father can fill it w/ more & more of his presence & power & peace – his love & hope & joy.

So *to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me & keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."* So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. I am well pleased w/ my weakness, because I know I have the favour/grace of the Father! God doesn't use weak people *despite* their weaknesses; God demonstrates his perfect power *through* their weakness to *reveal the strength of his grace the power of his Spirit the magnitude of his generosity* in Jesus Christ to the world. And Paul borrows from the prophet Jeremiah...

But *those who wish to boast should boast in this alone:
that they truly know me & understand
that I am the Lord who demonstrates unflinching love
& who brings justice & righteousness to the earth;
and that I delight in these things.*

God's greatest joy is to give...his kingdom now & to come...wholeness, joy, love, identity, forgiveness, satisfaction, peace, security...all things money cannot buy. And he gives those freely in Jesus who in his own life, death & resurrection also destroys the death that we will each one day face. The goal of all God's desires is to gather His children into his presence where he can lavish the abundance of his grace & love upon us forever.

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Take it home... Think through the earlier *FAITH CHAT* question...

How have you seen God's grace at work in you through your weakness?

What is one thing you will do this week to keep in mind your awareness of God's presence in your life & his power at work through you? PRAY

Father make us empty of us so that we can be filled with nothing but you. Carve out the self-interest & self-indulgence so that there's room in our hearts for those who don't yet know your goodness & grace. Strip us of us so that we can be remade in the likeness of Jesus...so that in us the world might experience the fullness of his saving love & power...AMEN