



SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY, JULY 12TH, 2020

The 'Craziness' of God's Generosity



Last week we followed the theme of dealing with our human drive for rivalry: the theme was “Beyond Rivalry”. From a human and social perspective, it is our rivalry with each other that generates violence, as we compete for recognition and power. Due to time factors, I limited what I had to say, but in last week’s Gospel reading there was a contrast drawn between John the Baptist and Jesus. For Matthew’s Gospel, John subscribed to a ‘God of violence’, who ostensibly would set things right, while Jesus of Nazareth, subscribes to forgiveness, healing and freedom, as the way forward: a way out of the rivalrous, pay-back cycle, Jesus unmask the violence within which we participate, moving onto a new way of seeing things, others and ourselves.

Today, we build on that theme, pointing to the needed inoculation that facilitates a spiritual, psychological and social change in and among human beings. This is the outrageous, shocking, wonderful idea of God’s generosity. As Christians, we have grown up with this conviction, but the very familiarity of it, has meant that we have taken it for granted, failing to understand its implications for relationships and social, political and economic dynamics. Today I want to explore this idea of “generosity” as the basis for a different world view. In doing so, I shall examine the Scripture for today and then develop the thought of the modern French mystic, “Simone Weil: her idea that “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” This will be followed by reference to the way we have come to think about and diminish ourselves through an exclusive economic lens.

WE GATHER

Announcements

We Prepare: Adoramus te Domine - We love you God - Taizé

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAMT6XHab9I>

Hymn: And can it be (TiS 209, Sagina, Charles Wesley)

Welcome

In the name of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lighting the Paschal Candle

Opening Prayers

The point I want to draw out of the Gospel for today is the crazy generosity – to the point of carelessness – of God, as expressed through Jesus, as God drapes the creation and our lives with life, justice and hope. Generally, we fail to see it, draping God in legalistic constructs: crushing rules and imposing regulations and morals.

Early morning, before the newly risen sun
begins to lay full force against the back,
the heavy sack of seed hangs by a strap
from the sower's shoulder.

One hand holds it open,
the other dips and rises
in perfect rhythm with the slow stride.
Sweeping wide through the quiet air
the seeds spray over the varied terrain
but the sower scarcely seems to care
that some lands among stones, some
among weeds, that seed lands upon
thin soil as much as on good.

Careless the sun, careless the rain.

Fling seed of new life over all the earth.
 Seed mercy in the stony soils of our hate.
 Seed justice in the weedy ground of our selfishness.
 Seed hope in the scorched sands of despair.
 May the harvest be abundant with joy.

***Careless the raw beauty.
 Careless the wild goodness.***

Fling your seed into the dusty lands of my life,
 Seed the dry earth of my stony heart.
 Seed where weeds crowd,
 where their leaves
 shade the sunlight.
 Seed the deep soil of my hungry soul.
 Grant harvest, abundant with joy.

Careless such seeds from the sower's hand.

The Peace

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Anecdotal Insights on Generosity



**“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”
 Simone Weil**

I am a beneficiary of the American people's generosity, and I hope we can have comprehensive immigration legislation that allows this country to continue to be enriched by those who were not born here.

Madeleine Albright

Happiness exists on earth, and it is won through prudent exercise of reason, knowledge of the harmony of the universe, and constant practice of generosity.

Jose Marti

Obviously, you would give your life for your children, or give them the last biscuit on the plate. But to me, the trick in life is to take that sense of generosity between kin, make it apply to the extended family and to your neighbour, your village and beyond. **Tom Stoppard**

Genesis 25:19-34: The Story of Jacob and Esau – A Pathological Theology (Good News Translation)

Rob Mayrick

Last week we read the story of the meeting of Isaac and Rebekah, and their marriage. The story moves on, Abraham and Sarah are dead, and Isaac is now a mature man, but we hear little more about him: he is in effect a transitional character in Genesis, passing on the mantel of promise to his son Jacob, who will become the father of the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. Whereas in the initial story of Abraham and Sarah, the issue was one of faith – living with the promise of a child against the odds – here Rebekah is speedily granted children, but here, fertility presents its own problems: rivalry.

The struggle in Rebekah's womb foreshadows the future struggle between the brothers over what is central to the promise. While God sets in motion the course of events in the narrative, the characters will have a hand in how those events play out. None of the characters is without blemish. They cheat, steal, deceive, plot, trick and lie. And yet these are the very people with whom Yahweh chooses to become entangled and give his promise. This murky world of human reality is the arena wherein Yahweh's word is brought to fulfilment.

¹⁹ This is the story of Abraham's son Isaac. ²⁰ Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel (an Aramean from Mesopotamia) and sister of Laban. ²¹ Because Rebecca had no children, Isaac prayed to the LORD for her. The LORD answered his prayer, and Rebecca became pregnant. ²² She was going to have twins, and before they were born, they struggled against each other in her womb. She said, "Why should something like this happen to me?" So she went to ask the LORD for an answer.

²³ The LORD said to her,

“Two nations are within you;
You will give birth to two rival peoples.
One will be stronger than the other;
The older will serve the younger.”

²⁴ The time came for her to give birth, and she had twin sons. ²⁵ The first one was reddish, and his skin was like a hairy robe, so he was named Esau.^[a] ²⁶ The second one was born holding on tightly to the heel of Esau, so he was named Jacob.^[b] Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilled hunter, a man who loved the outdoors, but Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home. ²⁸ Isaac preferred Esau, because he enjoyed eating the animals Esau killed, but Rebecca preferred Jacob.

²⁹ One day while Jacob was cooking some bean soup, Esau came in from hunting. He was hungry ³⁰ and said to Jacob, “I’m starving; give me some of that red stuff.” (That is why he was named Edom.^[c])

³¹ Jacob answered, “I will give it to you if you give me your rights as the first-born son.”

³² Esau said, “All right! I am about to die; what good will my rights do me?”

³³ Jacob answered, “First make a vow that you will give me your rights.”

Esau made the vow and gave his rights to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave him some bread and some of the soup. He ate and drank and then got up and left. That was all Esau cared about his rights as the first-born son.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm 119: 105-112 (Good News Translation)

Rob Mayrick

Psalm 119 dominates Book V of the Book of Psalms by its sheer length. Its length also dominates the interpretation of the psalm. These 176 verses are homage to the *torah* or ‘teaching/law’ and its significance in the life of one who fears Yahweh. The basic structure of the psalm is simple. The psalm is an alphabetic acrostic consisting of

twenty- two stanzas, each with eighth lines, each of which begins with the letter of the Hebrew alphabet for that stanza. The stanzas work sequentially through the alphabet. Within the overall structure of Psalm 119, a reflection on *torah* and its synonyms is developed. Eighth words are used to speak of *torah* with, for the most part, one used in each verse. They are translated in the NRSV: 'promise', 'word', 'statutes', 'commandments', 'decrees', 'precepts', and 'law' respectively. The words 'way' and 'faithfulness' are less frequent but could be added. While these words are synonyms for *torah*, they each add their own nuance to our understanding of *torah*.

Your word is a lamp to guide me
and a light for my path.

¹⁰⁶ *I will keep my solemn promise
to obey your just instructions.*

¹⁰⁷ My sufferings, LORD, are terrible indeed;
keep me alive, as you have promised.

¹⁰⁸ ***Accept my prayer of thanks, O LORD,
and teach me your commands.***

¹⁰⁹ I am always ready to risk my life;
I^[b] have not forgotten your law.

¹¹⁰ ***The wicked lay a trap for me,
but I have not disobeyed your commands.***

¹¹¹ Your commandments are my eternal possession;
they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹² ***I have decided to obey your laws
until the day I die.***

Romans 8:1-11: Paul Replaces the Law of Moses with the Spirit of Life, which Liberates Us (Good News Translation)

Last week we saw Paul depicting the human condition as one in which even God's good Law is turned to ill effect. "Who shall liberate us?" he asks in 7:24. We need to see that Paul maintains his defence of the Christian gospel which gives no prominent place to the Law. His conservative opponents think this is a betrayal. Surely Israel's Messiah would want them to uphold Israel's God given Law! Otherwise people will just turn to sin. This is even more acute now that the movement has opened itself to Gentiles. Paul has been countering their view by arguing that, good as the Law is, it cannot produce the kind of change required in people to set them free from the syndrome of sin, guilt, death and condemnation.

For Paul, there is a contrast between the Law and what Christ brings. So, it seems Paul is referring to a new law or principle when he speaks of the Spirit of life in Christ

Jesus which effectively replaces the Law of Moses. This becomes clear as we read on. 8:3 declares that the Law was weak, undermined by human personality in its corrupt state which keeps using it for its own ends. Romans 7 made that point. In response to this situation Paul sees God taking the initiative to bring about liberation. He sends his own Son right into the thick of the human predicament to deal with the situation.

8 There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me^[a] free from the law of sin and death. ³ What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature, to do away with sin. ⁴ God did this so that the righteous demands of the Law might be fully satisfied in us who live according to the Spirit, and not according to human nature. ⁵ Those who live as their human nature tells them to, have their minds controlled by what human nature wants. Those who live as the Spirit tells them to, have their minds controlled by what the Spirit wants. ⁶ To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace. ⁷ And so people become enemies of God when they are controlled by their human nature; for they do not obey God's law, and in fact they cannot obey it. ⁸ Those who obey their human nature cannot please God.

⁹ But you do not live as your human nature tells you to; instead, you live as the Spirit tells you to—if, in fact, God's Spirit lives in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ lives in you, the Spirit is life for you^[b] because you have been put right with God, even though your bodies are going to die because of sin. ¹¹ If the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, lives in you, then he who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of his Spirit in you.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23: The Story of the Outrageously Generous Sower (Good News Translation)

Pam Mayrick

The parable of the sower draws on very familiar earthy images which would have been part and parcel of everyday life in the rich granary of Galilee. At the earliest level, the parable on Jesus' lips may have been asserting that despite appearances - setbacks - God's kingdom would come and surprise us with its overwhelmingly rich harvest. This is all the more dramatic if the practice of the day was still to sow on the unkempt field

of dried out weeds and worn paths surviving since last summer and then to plough. To the uninformed it must have appeared stupid. Already there are two elements: faith in God, in the promise that the blessing for the poor and broken people will be realised. The second is that we hold onto this despite the apparent absurdity of the task, despite the setbacks. The parable asserts ultimate hope against hope, despite the misadventures of so many seeds.

13 That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. ² The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. ³ He used parables to tell them many things.

“Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. ⁴ As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. ⁶ But when the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. ⁷ Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants bore grain: some had one hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

⁹ And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

¹⁸ “Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means. ¹⁹ Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. ²⁰ The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. ²¹ But it does not sink deep into them, and they don't last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. ²² The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don't bear fruit. ²³ And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Sing of Colours (De colores, Anon, Mexico): The Outrageous Generosity of God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3YIZfPQ5gs>
 Associated with the Farm Labourer Movement in Central America and California and the Christian *Cursillo* Movement

A Film Clip from “Call the Midwife” (Series 2, Episode 5, 53:50 – 55:15)

Jane Sutton, a shy and withdrawn woman, fills in at Nonnatus House where the community’s attention to her draws her out into becoming more than she had ever imagined.

Some thoughts....

Let’s Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
 praise him, all creatures here below,
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Annette Burne

At the end of each prayer/petition with the words, *Lord Christ, hear our prayers* we say *help us to live generously*

Closing Hymn: Love Divine (TiS 217, Blaenwern, 590, C. Wesley)

Blessing and Sending Out

The blessing of God almighty,
 the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
 Be upon you and remain with you always

Our service has ended.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

We hear twice: Shalom to you (TiS 778, Somos del Señor, Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)

Musical Postlude

Organist:

John Hughes