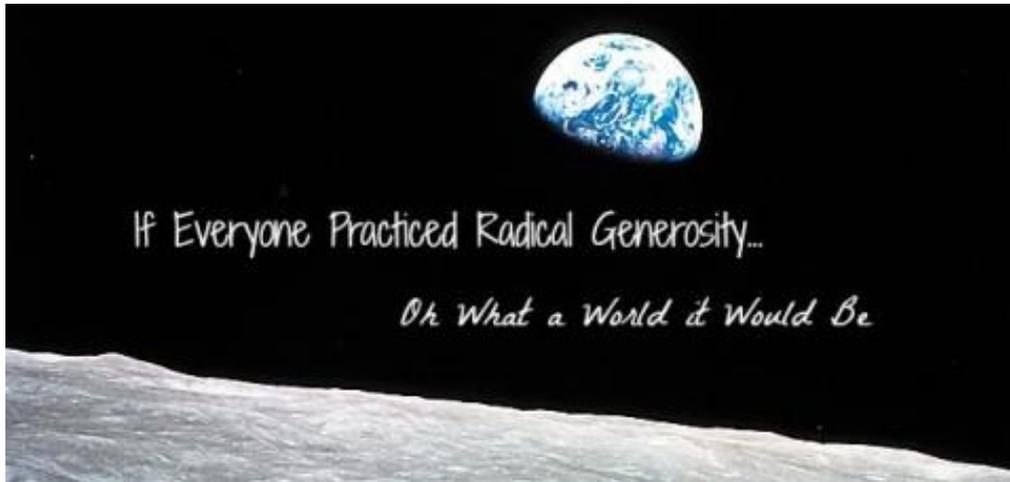




## SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### The Crazyiness of God's Generosity II: Suspending Judgment



Last week, we began reading from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. This is a key segment of the Gospel and we continue thinking upon this chapter for today and next week as well. Last Sunday, we read the story of the Generous Sower (Matt 13:1-9, 18-23). It dealt with the despair of the early Christian community of Matthew, as they came to terms with reality. Having expected an enthusiastic response to their presentation of the *Jesus faith*, what they experienced was much more muted, mixed with two basic problems. The first, was hostility from outside their community, especially, from the more articulate and socially well-placed synagogue. Second, there existed internal issues within the Christian community, over the question of Christian ethics. For one group, the Christian was to basically copy and maintain the Jewish prescriptions or rules, set down by the Jewish law. Opposed to this group were others, who held that faith in Jesus freed them not just from Jewish law but external ethical constraints altogether. What mattered to them, was *life in the spirit*, the capacity to live freely according to their internal spiritual gifts: a sort of libertarianism. These extremes of

Matthew's response to this latter group who devalue the place of ethics, is firstly, as we saw last week, to affirm God's radical generosity in Jesus. It is impossible to devalue the relational in the light of Jesus' own life and actions. Second, Matthew takes up the question of God's generosity in asking the question of how we respond to those with whom we don't agree, those with whom we conflict, those who we interpret as adversaries, perhaps even enemies. Let's explore this!

## GATHERING

### Announcements

#### **We Prepare Ourselves for Worship**

**Nada te turbe, nada te espante - Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten (Jacques Berthier, Taizé, TiS, 739)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go1-BoDD7CI>

**Hymn: Jesus the name (TiS, 218, Lydia, Charles Wesley)**

#### **Welcome**

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

The Lord be with you

**And with you**

#### **Lighting the Paschal Candle**

#### **Opening Prayers: Becoming Our Calling**

*Following on from last week when we thought through the theme of God's radical generosity sprung to life in Jesus of Nazareth, today the central idea is how to understand that divine generosity as the central mark of Christian existence. Here I want to point to the idea of this path of generosity as one that requires opening up, growing, maturation. In reflection of the Hebrew reading (Jacob's ladder) and the Gospel reading about wheat (legitimate) and weeds (illegitimate) plants, we do well to remember that we are people still to be realized, people who are yet to come to fruition, people in process.*

We start from where we are  
on this journey of becoming  
our calling, God-given and God-accepted:  
a field of weeds and wheat  
growing in *us* together

***handfuls of dough  
prepared for the leaven  
that empowers becoming bread;***

We start from where we are  
on this journey of becoming  
our calling, God-given and God-accepted:

***lost or wandering to a future,  
less than certain, or fleeing  
from fears or regrets of the past,***

making our bed in  
night-time wilderness,  
pillow feeling like stone.

and let the stairway  
be revealed, let the angels  
appear who travel its

open doorway, who are  
with us on our journey  
wherever we are.

***Let the hand of God  
be seen at work already***

let the yeast of God  
be revealed at work  
already in our dough;

let the voice of God  
be heard from where  
the angels reach,

and in the barren night-time,  
lifting our head  
from lying upon stone.

***Let the voice remind us  
we are in God's keeping,  
and that, wherever we are.***

**Peace**

## LET'S HEAR THE WORD

### Some Anecdotal Observations about Generosity to those we Fear Most: Our 'Adversaries'

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Beware of no man more than of yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us.

**Charles Spurgeon**

He who would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.

**Thomas Paine**

Always forgive your enemies - nothing annoys them so much.

**Oscar Wilde**

### **Genesis 28:10-19 (Good News Translation): Grace beyond Borders**

Joan Watson

The reading for today is about Jacob's dream that revolves around a ladder from earth to heaven. A few things are relevant. First, that there is no pick-up from last week's reading that pointed to Jacob's stealing of Esau's birthright through deception. The point here is the idea of the reinforcement of lineage from Abraham, through Isaac to Jacob. Second, the ladder or stairway to heaven is about communication between Jacob and God.

Dreams of this nature were thought to be a means of communication between God and people. Third, the issue at hand is not about faith or otherwise, as it was with Abraham, but whether faith can be sustained *beyond the limits of the land that is given*. The Ancient Hebrews had a very territorial view of Yahweh's own limits. The challenge is for Jacob to continue to be confident in the promises of God, although God's guidance will be less visible, less tangible than it was for Abraham. Important to this idea is the challenge to the *Hebrews to not dogmatize their faith as something that is exclusively theirs*.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beersheba and started toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> At sunset he came to a holy place<sup>[a]</sup> and camped there. He lay down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. <sup>12</sup> He dreamed that he saw a stairway reaching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and coming down on it. <sup>13</sup> And there was the LORD standing beside him.<sup>[b]</sup> “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac,” he said. “I will give to you and to your descendants this land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> They will be as numerous as the specks of dust on the earth. They will extend their territory in all directions, and through you and your descendants I will bless all the nations.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>15</sup> Remember, I will be with you and protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all that I have promised you.”

<sup>16</sup> Jacob woke up and said, “The LORD is here! He is in this place, and I didn't know it!” <sup>17</sup> He was afraid and said, “What a terrifying place this is! It must be the house of God; it must be the gate that opens into heaven.”

<sup>18</sup> Jacob got up early next morning, took the stone that was under his head, and set it up as a memorial. Then he poured olive oil on it to dedicate it to God. <sup>19</sup> He named the place Bethel.<sup>[d]</sup> (The town there was once known as Luz.)

The word of the Lord

***Thanks be to God***

### **Psalm 139: 1-12, 23-24**

Joan Watson

Psalm 139 is something of an exception in the Old Testament, speaking strongly and positively about the individual. Nevertheless, it acts as a foil to the modern obsession with privacy and individuality. The psalm does not deny the importance of the individual; it positively underlines it. But it also questions our rigorous pursuit of and desire for privacy, and whether such a pursuit is ultimately in our best interest. For while Psalm 139 is about the individual and has a very private feel to it, the psalm is even more about the invasion of our privacy – by none other than God. This is a comforting psalm in terms of God’s intimate knowledge of us and care for us. It is also a frightening psalm because to be known so intimately is ultimately to be open to the other. The lectionary selections for today give us a taste of both sides of the psalm. No relation with God, however comforting, is ever entirely without awe and trepidation.

**139** LORD, you have examined me and you know me.

***2 You know everything I do;***

***from far away you understand all my thoughts.***

***3*** You see me, whether I am working or resting;  
you know all my actions.

***4 Even before I speak,***

***you already know what I will say.***

***5*** You are all around me on every side;  
you protect me with your power.

***6 Your knowledge of me is too deep;***  
***it is beyond my understanding.***

***7*** Where could I go to escape from you?

Where could I get away from your presence?

***8 If I went up to heaven, you would be there;***

***if I lay down in the world of the dead, you would be there.***

***9*** If I flew away beyond the east  
or lived in the farthest place in the west,

***10 you would be there to lead me,***  
***you would be there to help me.***

***11*** I could ask the darkness to hide me  
or the light around me to turn into night,

***12 but even darkness is not dark for you,***  
***and the night is as bright as the day.***

***Darkness and light are the same to you.***

***23*** Examine me, O God, and know my mind;  
test me, and discover my thoughts.

***24 Find out if there is any evil in me***

***and guide me in the everlasting way.<sup>[d]</sup>***

## **Romans 8:12-25**

This passage rounds off well to the theme with which Romans 5 began: hope. Partly the issue is personal: Paul's sufferings indicated to his adversaries and even some allies, that God was not blessing him and approving his gospel. A naive (but in part biblically supported) theology of success calls Paul's credentials into question. In response Paul refuses to descend to name calling. Instead he goes back to the heart of the gospel as he understands it and mounts his case not really for himself - but for God! Paul does theology. We have the benefit in the passage of seeing how Paul, having dealt with the Law issue, turns to show how faith faces struggle. He knows he tells his own story but also addresses the story of many others, including those who will hear his letter read before them in Rome. This is Paul's testimony to hope against hope, hope in the face of adversity.

<sup>12</sup> So then, my friends, we have an obligation, but it is not to live as our human nature wants us to. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to your human nature, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death your sinful actions, you will live. <sup>14</sup> Those who are led by God's Spirit are God's children. <sup>15</sup> For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, "Father! my Father!" <sup>16</sup> God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory.

<sup>18</sup> I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his children. <sup>20</sup> For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so. Yet there was the hope <sup>21</sup> that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. <sup>23</sup> But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us his children and<sup>[a]</sup> set our whole being free. <sup>24</sup> For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (Good News Translation)**

#### **The Story of the Wheat and Weeds**

Ashley Jacobsson

Following on from last Sunday's reading of God as the Generous Sower, here the question is how does the Christian manage this ethos of generosity grounded in Jesus in relationships with those considered adversaries – see the introductory notes in the title page). In this reading, Matthew counsels prudence, clear that the tendency to demonize those who oppose us, is something that we humans do readily, but not something that is innate to the way God operates.

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> One night, when everyone

was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, then the weeds showed up. <sup>27</sup> The man's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?' <sup>28</sup> 'It was some enemy who did this,' he answered. 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' they asked him. <sup>29</sup> 'No,' he answered, 'because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.'"

<sup>36</sup> When Jesus had left the crowd and gone indoors, his disciples came to him and said, "Tell us what the parable about the weeds in the field means."

<sup>37</sup> Jesus answered, "The man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup> the field is the world; the good seed is the people who belong to the Kingdom; the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One; <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed the weeds is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvest workers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered up and burned in the fire, so the same thing will happen at the end of the age: <sup>41</sup> the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather up out of his Kingdom all those who cause people to sin and all others who do evil things, <sup>42</sup> and they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and gnash their teeth. <sup>43</sup> [a] Then God's people will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Listen, then, if you have ears!

The Gospel of the Lord

***Praise to you Lord Christ***

**Hymn: The Great Love of God (TiS 164, D.T. Niles, Thailand)**

**A Film Clip from the contemporary movie, "Hidden Figures"**

Katherine is a talented mathematician assigned to the Task Space Group of NASA because of her skills in analytic geometry. She confronts constant resistance due to her colour and her gender. In this clip, her capacity in revealing a problem with the capsule, which she

has deduced from limited data infuriates her superiors who suspect her of being a Russian spy. (41:57-45:07)

**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**

Jane Ann Tainsh

At the end of each prayer/petition we say, "***In our darkness there is no darkness O Lord, the deepest night is as clear as day***" (TiS 725, La Tenebre, Berthier)

**Closing Hymn: The Church's one foundation (TiS, 457, Aurelia, SJ Stone)**

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

**Musical Postlude**

**Organist:**

Jim Abraham