

Genesis 45:1-15a
Psalm 138
Acts 9:1-19
Luke 10:25-37

Sermon February 17th Sermon Series Part 2

God's Generosity is Unimaginable and Life Altering

Last week we talked about some of the challenges that can get in our way of being generous to others. Today, we hear stories where God and God's people find ways to overcome these challenges showing generosity to others in unimaginable and life altering ways.

For example, Joseph who is beaten and sold into slavery by his brothers now has a chance to get even. Joseph is in a position of authority in the Egyptian Empire, and his brothers are in need of his services. There isn't a more opportune time for Joseph to get his revenge.

However, as we see in our reading of Genesis this morning, Joseph shocks and awes his brothers and us the listeners of his story by forgiving his brothers. Then Joseph promises them the best farm land in the region if they move to Egypt.

God's generosity reflected through Joseph's act of forgiveness and act of giving the most fertile lands to his family breathes new life into the Israelites who up to this point were suffering from the great famine. God's generosity can be so unimaginable and life altering.

Does this story resonate with you? Like Joseph's brothers have you ever been amazed, shocked, moved to tears by someone's unimaginable and life altering generosity? Or like Joseph, have you ever moved someone else to amazement, shock, and tears when reflecting God's unimaginable and life altering generosity?

In Acts this morning, we hear Saul's conversion story. Saul who was so blinded by his zealous beliefs about Christians and his interpretation of the law that he arrested and killed many people who chose to follow Jesus. No one in the Christian community could ever see God showing mercy to Saul. And then to invite Saul to be an integral part of the leadership of the church. Not a chance!

Well, here is Saul on the way to Damascus to arrest and even kill more followers of Jesus. When suddenly he is blinded by Christ, forgiven, and invited to be an integral part of the leadership of the church. Ananias is then sent to Saul to heal and baptize him. Can you imagine how difficult it is for Ananias to reflect God's generosity towards Saul? Yet, Ananias chooses generosity and Saul goes on to change his name to Paul spreading the news of Jesus throughout the Gentile world. Transforming the church and the world forever. Paul's heart changes, because of the generosity of God and God's followers. God's generosity is unimaginable and life altering.

Like Saul on the ground near Damascus, have you ever felt guilt and shame, knowing that you deserved punishment, but instead received amazing grace? Did this generosity, this grace, alter your life, your heart?

In our gospel this morning, this Lawyer tries to test Jesus by asking Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. So, Jesus takes the bait and answers the Lawyer. Jesus invites the Lawyer to love God and love his neighbors. When the Lawyer asks who is his neighbor? Jesus shocks everyone with his answer.

Jesus shares a parable about a person of Jewish faith who has been beaten up by robbers. The Priest and Levite walk right on by him. Now it is easy to demonize these religious leaders for their actions, but they were just following their traditions. If they come in contact with the person they will become defiled and not able to perform their ceremonial duties at the Temple. Also, they need to be careful wandering on the paths between towns and cities as many robbers set traps where someone who looks mangled lays on the side of the road. And then when someone stops the robbers jump out of the bush and seize the unsuspecting person.

My Dad actually shared a story with me where my Dad, Mom, sister, and I were heading to Grandma's house on this secondary highway. My Dad saw this person lying on the side of the road. Feeling concerned for the well-being of this person my Dad went to pull over to see what he could do to help. As he started to slow down my Mom saw three other figures hiding in the bush ready to pounce. My Dad turned back on the road. The person got up and moved to the middle of the road. My Dad hit the gas knowing that if he stopped all of us would be in danger. The person knew my Dad wasn't

stopping and jumped out of the way at the last moment. It isn't easy to risk ourselves to help others.

So, we could focus on the Priest and the Levite, and how they didn't stop to help. But this isn't the main reason Jesus shares this story. Jesus wants us to focus more so on the Samaritan person who walks by and takes pity on the Jewish person. The Samaritan person picks him up and takes him to an inn where he cares for him and then pays someone else to care for him. The Samaritan faced the same risks, but chose to take these risks to offer help to the wounded person.

Now to understand how unimaginable this parable was to the people who heard it we need to understand how the Samaritan people were perceived by the Jewish people. Samaritans were ceremonially unclean, social outcasts, and religious heretics. As they built their own temple in another place outside Jerusalem. To say a Samaritan is a neighbor to a person of Jewish belief in this period of time would come off as nonsense. But, this is exactly who Jesus says our neighbor is. Even those we outcast. God's generosity is unimaginable and life altering.

Could we imagine what this beaten up person thought of Samaritans after his encounter with this Samaritan person? Have you ever experienced this kind of generosity from someone you least expected it from? Did it change or reshape your view of this person? Did it move you to be generous to those you would normally not be generous to?

In high school I went out with this girl for about three weeks, which is equivalent to dating for three months in the adult world. Unfortunately, she was really abusive and was using me for all the things I was buying her. When I finally woke up to this realization I was heart broken. We ended up breaking up at this Lutheran youth event in down town Edmonton. I remember being so angry and hurt that I just lost it. I started taking my pain and anger out on this bus stop booth. I was kicking it. Punching it. Swearing at it. People that attended the youth group event were looking at me really weird. I could even hear some saying, "Who invited this weirdo?"

Eventually, this indigenous person walked up to me. Unfortunately, like many of us I had carried with me a lot of negative views towards

indigenous people. Some from experience. Some from things I heard from others I respected and looked up to. So, I saw this Indigenous person in a similar light to how a Jewish person saw a Samaritan person.

At first, I was a little afraid. When this person seemed to care about my well being. I broke down and told him what happened. He listened genuinely, and helped me see things in a more positive light. I was in complete shock and awe of this person's compassion and generosity towards me. I can say this was a life altering moment for me, especially in how it changed my perception towards indigenous people.

God's generosity is unimaginable and life altering. We all have wrestled with our brokenness and shame. Yet, we all receive God's unimaginable and life altering generosity through Christ Jesus who hangs on a cross for us. Who forgives us. Who takes our shame away. Who breathes new life into us. We all have been impacted by God's grace. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here today.

And it is in this generosity we experience that we are inspired to live out this generosity towards others. To forgive in unimaginable and life altering ways. To reach out to the Samaritans, the outcasts in our community welcoming them. Healing them. Helping them fulfil their needs. Breathing new life into them. Changing the world in unimaginable and life altering ways.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks for your gracious generosity. We give thanks that you alter our lives with your unconditional love. Inspire us to live out this unimaginable and life altering generosity in our world. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**