

Lent C-3, 2007

March 11, 2007

Luke 13: 1-9; I Cor. 10: 1-13; Isaiah 55: 1-9

Title: Give

Grace to you and peace from God our father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last weekend Sally and I visited our son Peter in Boston. Five months ago Peter announced that he was going to church. It was an answer to prayer.

Four short years ago, Peter, who is mildly autistic, announced to us upon leaving for Boston that he was no longer a member of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. It was part of an adolescent's declaration of independence --- And he knew the power those words had over me, especially.

So needless to say, when years later Peter declared he was returning to church, I didn't bark---Thought you were Done with church!—I simply inquired what prompted this?

“Dad, I'm looking for a girlfriend. And church might be a good place to find one!”
TMI. Too Much Information!

Well, last Sunday Sally and I sat with Peter at worship!! No girlfriend. Not likely to find one there. And this Sunday he is ushering at Church for the first time! I'm a little worried.

Peter is such a rule driven person. This is a boy who once lost a job as a cashier because in the middle of a transaction it became 5pm—quitting time. Peter left at 5pm. I'm worried because Peter just might hold the offering plate in front of those people until they put something in.

His mindset: This is what you are supposed to do!
It says right here offering—so that's what you do.

Giving is such a highly charged topic. Emotionally laden. Perhaps at no other place

In our faith walk are we more tested. I have far more reasons why I ought to hang on to 'my' money, than I do to let go of it, relinquish it!

And we live today bombarded with claims that your worth is determined by how much you have. This is the food we eat. A direct connection between value and possessions. It is the idolatry of the age. GIVE?

We Christians give in response to the generosity of God. To give is to know that you are deeply rooted in the Giver. Everything is gift.

To be disciplined in giving, to tithe, is to regularly remind yourself of our total dependence on God. Reminder of where our loyalties belong---

The disciples heart belongs to God. Believe in Christ—Love God first! Giving is a one of the marks of discipleship. Along with Prayer, Bible reading, worship, Christian community, serving—these marks of discipleship are habits of the heart that keep us open to the wonder and mystery of God's active presence in our lives. An offering plate in front of us is

Not an obligation---it's a privilege, a privilege to be in the Stream of grace!!

Notice what Paul does in I Corinthians 10. He reminds the church Of the faithfulness of God—God delivered their ancestors

Through the sea, given food to live by in the wilderness,
And when thirsty provided with ample drink—rock of Christ.

Pure grace!

I would not want you to be unaware brothers and sisters

Today the rock of Christ poured out over Maya
Siriniyom Martin—the pure grace of Jesus lavished on her
through Holy Baptism.

But our spiritual ancestors they fell

Away from grace. They forgot who they were to
be in this world.

They began eating the wrong food. They dried up and died.
Failing to grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God.

It was Martin Luther King, Jr. who contended that spiritual death is far greater than physical death. Often it's when you come to A decision that will make a witness with your life And out of fear you chose not to make it.

Says King: "You may live to be 80, but the cessation of breathing Is but the belated announcement of an earlier death. Giving is a spiritual decision.

Lent is always about reconsidering the state of one's life. It's about turning to life.

Notice what Jesus does upon raising questions about the connection between

Bad things happening and God?
Evil politicians murdering, towers falling killing are no different Than in our day the bus falling over the guard rail in Atlanta and the journalists being beheaded.
Jesus reframes those questions; turns them of their heads.

By acknowledging that life can be tenuous,
Jesus invites us to look at the health of our lives.
So embody fully now the life God gives.
Don't be a barren fig tree
Bear fruit.
Giving is about fruitfulness.

Like the individual who senses the push to be fruitful sets aside time to Seek out persons who have been in his life path. She went to them to heal some wounds, to offer some thanksgivings, to bend her heart toward others. It was as though an offering plate was being held in Front of her---Give, bear fruit, God will assist us.

The barren fig tree was cared for three years. Long enough To have produced and it didn't. The sensible thing to do is Cut it down. Don't waste the good soil.
Let it alone one more year until I dig around it and put

Manure on it.

Far from a God who topples towers and murders innocents our Lord is a Gardener who gives us time to renew. To be alert to such generosity Is to live.

“God is faithful and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” I Cor. 10: 13

At the Stephen Ministry Breakthrough Leadership Conference last October we saw an old Donald Duck cartoon. A small boat had sank into the ocean. Donald decided to raise the boat with ping pong balls. So these were pumped down into the cabin of the boat and there it rose.

Just a cartoon? We then watched an episode of Myth Busters Who sank a boat. Pumped it full of ping pong balls And it rose to the surface. One ping pong ball couldn't do it, A boat full could.

The marks of discipleship are like the steady, daily ping pong ball. They will impact our living.

Together build up. To give is to practice a profound and life giving Reality---sharing what we have been given, yet a reminder of the one Who is faithful, not only saving us from bottom of the sea, From barrenness, but fulfilling us as his children—alive together In christ. Today is the day to give and live. For God in Christ is Wanting to float many boats!!