

Sermon Series: “If we are the body . . .”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—7/9/2006

Title: “Influencing our community with God’s love”

Text: Deuteronomy 15: 7-11

Intro.: Ills.: Giving from the piggy bank

Theme: When we go out into our community to care and share with our neighbors, it powerfully backs up the life-transforming message of Christ in our lives.

The challenges we face in being the “living” Body of Christ

- *Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:1*
- Fighting off sterile and hardened Christianity
 1. A hardened heart toward God’s leading and others in need
 - a. **Ills.: Soil conditions in the garden this time of the summer**
 - b. *“Don’t become hardhearted” vs. 7*
 - c. When we don’t acknowledge that all we have and are has been received from God
 - d. *For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation. Heb. 6: 7-9*
 2. A sterile practice of religion rather than faith before God
 - a. *“Tight-fisted” vs. 7* – intentional actions taken to prevent us from sharing with others in need
 - b. When we view the poor and destitute with a critical eye and put pre-conditions on our care for them
 - c. **Ills.: Shantytown dwellers**
 - d. When we look for excuses for why we shouldn’t give rather than looking for opportunities to give
 - i. God decried the skirting of the year of Jubilee (**Print vs. 9**) and the outcry of the poor to the Lord against us
 - ii. God’s intent was his people’s generosity would mirror his “forgiveness” of debt (**Print 15: 1-4**)
 - iii. Confessing and repenting of “white-knuckled” attitudes toward our things and others’ needs
- Made new so that we can rub off on our community
 1. It begins when you were brought into a relationship to Jesus Christ and he gave you his Spirit
 2. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 1 Cor. 2:12*

Developing the habit of Godly, generous giving within our lives

- Giving to other’s needs because we have been given rather than giving to get something (**Print 15: 10**)
 1. It would be easy to misinterpret verse 10 and let it become a selfish reaction rather than a grateful response
 2. God’s command to give is in the context of need not the anticipated blessing
 3. *“Freely you received, freely give. Matthew 10:8*
 4. Convinced of God’s past saving action and of his future promise to provide, we willingly adopt his generous spirit
 5. *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Cor. 9:8*
- Giving to other’s needs as an ongoing witness to an ever present poverty in our midst (**Print 15: 11**)
 1. The Heavenly Father wants his children to be known for their generosity
 2. *He will not fear evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord His heart is upheld, he will not fear, until he looks with satisfaction on his adversaries. He has given freely to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted in honor. Psalm 112:7-9*
 3. **Ills.: the joy of service**

Shantytown dwellers

If the world had 1,000 people, the number who would live in a shantytown: 600 **Development Innovations and Networks, Geneva, reported in Chicago Tribune, 1990. "To Verify," Leadership.**

The Joy of Service

Pounding hammers and whirring saws are Jim Paputsa's tools of trade. But when winter weather halts his work, the Chicago Heights, Illinois, builder heads to the Dominican Republic knowing a new adventure awaits him. Jim first traveled to the island with one of his workers, Victor Rodriguez. The Rodriguez family lives in a remote, mountainous, coffee-growing region where narrow, treacherous roads connect the widely scattered villages. Jim stayed for a month, repairing homes and improving water supplies and sanitation. "All I could offer was my work. I had my Bible with me, but I couldn't speak much Spanish. Victor did a lot of translating." Back home, Jim began studying Spanish. When he returned the following winter, he noticed something he had missed before. "There were a lot of barefoot kids--too poor to afford even rubber shoes." Before his third trip, Jim asked his church [Orland Park Christian Reformed] to donate shoes. "I expected maybe fifty pairs--I got 250! They covered my entire living room floor." They also filled large coffee bean baskets slung on a mule's back Jim borrowed on his arrival. "I trekked up some pretty tricky paths and with every pair of shoes, I gave away tracts or Bibles." Then he waited to see what would happen. Jim didn't have to wait long. One afternoon, a boy ran up to him shouting, "Christian! Christian! Come here!" "He took me to his house," Jim explains, the memory still fresh. "There the whole family had gathered on the patio where they dry their coffee beans. They wanted me to read the Bible to them!" With his English/Spanish Bible, Jim read key passages phonetically. He spent many days with new friends who waved him on to their porches to read. Now that the shoes have opened doors, Jim can't wait to go back. "These people have nothing, yet the simplest things bring them such joy. Hopefully, that joy will be multiplied as they discover what God can give them." **Lynn Austin, Christian Reader, "Ordinary Heroes."**

Giving from the Piggy Bank

In our town's elementary school at the beginning of the year, the school secretary routinely collects the lunch money from the new kindergartners. This solves the problem of lost money. But for nervous 5-year-olds, it took a few days to understand what was happening. For two days, the secretary would come into the room and ask in a loud voice, "Does anybody have any lunch money for me?" Her question was met with no response. On the third day, one little boy came in at the bell, walked hesitantly to the teacher's desk, held out his hand and whispered, "Here is lunch money from my piggy bank for the poor lady nobody gives money to." **June Spivey, Christian Reader, Vol. 34.**

Deut. 15:7-11

⁷If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ⁸Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. ⁹Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. ¹⁰Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. ¹¹There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land. [NIV]

Deut. 15:1-4

At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. . .there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you.