



2009 National Convention
Sunday, June 28, 2009
National Bishop Susan C. Johnson

ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

Pentecost 4
Sunday June 28, 2009

2 Samuel 1.1, 17-27

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8.7-15

Now as you excel in everything _ in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you _ so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something _ now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has _ not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

Mark 5.21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about

Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Grace to you and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the reading from Corinthians today we hear St. Paul asking the members of the church in Corinth to be generous. We, too, are called on to be generous. It is part of what being a disciple, of following Jesus, is all about.

We like to think we are generous people. If I were to ask you today, “put up your hands if you think you are generous,” I imagine that most of you would raise your hand. Or at least I can’t imagine you raising your hand if I asked, “put up your hand if you think you aren’t generous!”

We can point to examples of our generosity, again both personally and as a church. We give our offerings, we support our seminaries and our schools, we give to global hunger, our church does wonderful work in justice issues, in doing relief and development work around the world.

Except that there are other statistics that would show that we aren’t as generous as we would like to think. The average ELCIC Lutheran gives 2% of their income to the wider church. Now I know that means that some people give much more and some people give much less. And let’s face it, our society, built on conspicuous and competitive consumerism, lures us away from generosity to selfishness.

But it’s not just about money. How many of us are also parsimonious with our time, our kindness, our love, and our forgiveness.

Or, how many of us draw a line where we say, “I have been generous enough” – for example proudly boasting that we are tithers as if we can fulfill the expectation for generosity. Or thinking that we are forgiving enough, after all we gave that person a second chance and everyone knows it’s three strikes and you’re out.

Our Lord reminds us again and again that we are invited to follow him into a life of generosity. Jesus’ teachings were pretty specific. We are shown as a positive example the story of the widow who gives, while not much, everything she has. And by contrast we are told the story of the rich young ruler, who when asked to give away everything he has and follow Jesus, turns away, unable to fulfill the request. Jesus asks us to forgive seventy times seven, to turn the other cheek, to give not just your coat but your cloak as well.

Jesus doesn’t just teach about generosity, he also models for us a life of generosity. He doesn’t turn away but he feeds the five thousand. He eats with outcasts and sinners. He heals both the woman with the haemorrhage and Jairus’s daughter. He gives up his life for us. Everything Jesus does, everything Jesus is excels in generosity!

What can we learn from Jesus’ modelling of generosity? How can we become more generous as both individuals and as a church?

I heard that Reginald Bibby once challenged a gathering by stating that Christians should be great tippers. He said, wouldn’t it be wonderful if every time someone received a big tip, they would say, wow, that must have been a Christian. That comment struck me, and I’ve tried to be a generous tipper ever since.

Another thing that has helped me break out of my own personal tightness is the example of others - those who have taught me generosity by their example of giving and living. My parents who let me see the cheques they wrote out to church and introduced me to the concept of tithing. My grandparents who by the time they were retired had grown their tithing to 40% of their income.

I think the call to be generous also has something to say about the way we treat each other, both in and outside of the church. Within the ELCIC we do not agree about everything and in fact sometimes we strongly disagree! But what does it mean to be generous with one another as we engage our differences? How can we generously use both our speaking and our listening to one another?

When I was in Jordan, Israel and Palestine with Lutheran bishops from Canada and the US, I had the amazing experience of listening to a presentation by members of The Parents Circle–Families Forum, an organization made up of both Israelis and Palestinians who have experienced the loss of a close family member through the conflict in the Middle East. We heard the story of Mazen Faraj, a Palestinian refugee whose 62-year-old father was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers, and we heard the story of Rami Elhanan, an Israeli whose 14-year-old daughter was killed by two Palestinian suicide bombers. In the still raw telling of their loss a miracle happened.

These two men who could have just as easily chosen to hate each other, actually cared for and support each other. They are committed to working for peace and reconciliation between their peoples so that others will not have to share their painful experience of losing a loved one. They confessed the temptation they both experienced of going a different way – down the path of revenge and hatred. Their marvellous witness of deep forgiveness moved me that day and will continue to help me as I struggle to forgive and to be forgiven.

The greatest help for us in emulating the generosity of Jesus comes to us from Jesus himself. Christ the healer comes to those who suffer from physical and emotional ills, but Christ the healer also comes to help us come to terms with our denial, our tunnel vision, our selfishness, our drivenness, our mixed up priorities, or whatever else keeps us from graciously responding to God's generosity in all of the avenues of our lives.

Our national church has been meeting in convention this week, meeting under the theme *In Mission for Others: Signs of Hope*. The stories of hope we will have heard and shared of mission, ministry and outreach are all signs and models for us of the generous lives we are called to live. I look forward to the opportunity to share these stories with you and to hear your stories of generous living and faithful mission as well.

May God bless us and equip us as we strive more and more to be generous, with all that gifts that were first generously given to us, both as individuals and as a church.

Amen.