

Sermon Study Guide - 3.14.2010

ACCESS – Week 4



ACCESS: GENEROSITY

WEEK OF MARCH 14, 2010

DISCUSSION: TOGETHER AS A GROUP

- Living in the Pacific Northwest we are blessed with an abundance of water. Almost everyone likes some type of activity that involves being in, on, or by water: swimming, fishing, sailing, surfing, diving, snorkeling, walking on the beach, or going on a cruise, just to name a few.
 - As we start out, let's each share a personal favorite water-related experience we've had or activity we frequently enjoy.
- We usually participate in these activities without giving much thought to where the water comes from. Take rivers: We can easily think of rivers as bodies of water when in fact they are really nothing more than channels carved out of the ground by water that was delivered from the sky in the form of rain or snow, or from a subterranean spring, or from another body of water.
- Paul's teaching this week focused on the subject of generosity. But what does it mean to be generous? We may think of generosity as the compassion and willingness to give away something *we have* to someone else who needs it. This may sound noble enough, but it causes us to think of ourselves as the source and someone else as the recipient of *our goodness*.
 - What difference would it make if we thought of generosity as the willing and enjoying *passing along* of resources received from a plentiful source to needy recipients?

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 JOHN 4:7-11

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- Like water, love has a source! According to this passage:
 - How do we know God loves us?

- What is the natural response to God's love?
- But we're not talking about love, we're talking about money right?! The two are strongly linked. Read Luke 16:9-14.
 - What does Jesus see as the purpose of money?
 - What do you think Jesus meant by 'true riches' (v. 11)
 - What was the response of the Pharisees (the good, religious people of the day) to Jesus' teaching? What motivated their response?
 - What is your response to Jesus teaching?

READ 1 JOHN 3:16-24

¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

- We can, both as individuals and as communities, build structures that block the flow of resources. Unlike the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River, these structures can be subtle. Sometimes the evidence can be seen in our closets or garages (see the story of the rich man as told by Jesus in Luke 12), or by visiting a third-world country.
-
- On Sunday, Paul challenged us to give generously to shore up the financial strength of Westport.
 - How have you personally experienced the love of God through Westport?
 - How have you seen God's love expressed through Westport to Hillsboro and beyond?

- Let's close our time in prayer with Paul's exhortation from Sunday in mind: "The more I ACCESS my Father's generous heart, the more I ACT with a generous hand."
 - Ask God to increase your grasp of His boundless love for you.
 - Ask God to show us how we can tangibly and generously share that love through acts of generosity.

REFLECTION: RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Generosity can be a very difficult subject if for no other reason than the fact that we tend to focus on what we lack rather than on what we have. Below are some stories and texts from Scripture for you to read and reflect on this week. As you read and reflect, ask some questions of each passage (hint: sometimes answers can only be found by expanding your reading to include what is written before and/or after a given text!):

- Who are the characters in this passage?
- What were their circumstances—what would it have been like to be in their situation?
- How did God intervene? *When* did He intervene? What can I learn about the character of God in these instances?
- Reflecting on my own situation, the flow of resources may be higher or lower right now. What should I be asking God to provide for me? It may be more resources. Perhaps it may be the wisdom to be a good steward of what He is sending my way. Look to Him and search for His heart.

Day 1: 2 Kings 4:1-7, God provides miraculously for a desperate widow and her son.

Day 2: Exodus 16:1-34, God feeds the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt.

Day 3: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Paul's appeal to a blessed congregation on behalf of a suffering one.

Day 4: Isaiah 35:1-10, Promises and encouragements of blessings to come.

Day 5: Psalm 78, an account of God's continuous provision for His people Israel.