

**Sermon: Generations of Generosity****Scripture: Psalm 145****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: October 29, 2023**

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“From generation to generation, we celebrate God’s goodness, God is gracious and compassionate, full of love.”

But if this true, then what do we do with the thousand devastated Jewish families in Israel and the thousands of Palestinians and their families who are dying now? And what do we say in light of the families in Maine who whose lives are shattered by the mass shooting up there? The generations and generations of those who will be impacted by the violence they’ve endured and are enduring? How do we celebrate God’s goodness and say God is gracious and compassionate? How do we say that the Creator of this world-that-is-full-of-violence, is full of love? Do we have to be in denial of these atrocities to make such a claim? Is it just our privileged that allows us to proclaim that “God is good, all the time”, as the saying goes. When we are comfortable and provided for and not scraping our existence out in poverty or living in war zones it seems like it’s easier to proclaim and celebrate God’s goodness, but it seems rather naïve if not unfair.

But actually, the words that we’ve sung and heard Betsy read are not the words of comfortable first world citizens living in a consumer culture of ease. Actually, anything but. They were written by a poet of the Hebrew people, who were an enslaved people, an exiled people, steamrolled by brutal empires and then almost as soon as they caught their breath, steamrolled by the next one, a traumatized people. They were the ones who wrote from “generation to

generation we celebrate Your goodness, God. You are gracious and compassionate, full of love.”

I don't know, maybe they were clear on where the fault should be placed for much of the suffering in the world, not with God but with humans who tend to distort God's goodness in an effort to become gods themselves, or as the German theologian Jurgen Moltmann explains it, “dehumanized man pursuing his own interest, (he) who cannot let God be God but must make himself the unhappy and proud God of his own self, his fellow men and his world.” And really. We slaughter and kidnap innocents in their homes, at a music festival, children and elderly and then ask “where is God?” or say “How can there be a good God in this world.” We bomb city streets to oblivion in retaliation for wrong done to us and then ask “If there is a good God why is there such evil in the world?” We continue to allow weapons of war to run rampant in our country with no willingness to put even the most basic controls over it in place and then wring our hands saying “where is God in this?” can you imagine? I imagine God's like “are you kidding me?! Where are you in this? I'm struggling to believe in the good in you?!”

So maybe the Hebrew people in all their pain and sufferings, knew where much of that blame should be placed, not with God but with “dehumanized man” and what goodness they did find in the world, they knew where the gratitude for that should be placed – we celebrate God's goodness, even here, we celebrate God's goodness, the One who is gracious and compassionate full of love.

And it was out of the Hebrew people that arose another response to the question of evil of where is God amidst the violence and suffering of our world. It was a response for the ages, a Word, we've called it, that is still hard to hear but

has been spoken with passion and that was simply the executed Messiah, the violated Lord, the crucified God.

Where is God amidst the evil of the world – God's not encouraging it or powerless against it or not caring about it, Jesus on the cross is the word that God speaks into the evil of the world saying I am there with you in it. It might not be an answer we like but it is the answer that only True Love gives. IT's the answer that The Great Higher Power who is unwilling to control us or dominate us or disempower us gives us. The gift of Godself. And ideally it's an answer that calls us forth to be a part of the answer as well to where is God in the midst of evil and suffering - that we are called as God's people to be there, to offer compassion and goodness and grace and forgiveness especially, most especially, where compassion is lacking and goodness is absent and grace is nowhere to be found and forgiveness is in short supply, especially there we followers and proclaimers of the crucified God are called to manifest those qualities of God's love.

To say that God is a crucified God rather than a controller and crucifier and a condemner God is to fundamentally claim that generosity is a quality of who this God is. Jesus on the cross, we say, is God giving Godself to the violent world out of love to transform it one heart at a time into a world without violence, a world not of greed but of generosity, a world not of retaliation but of forgiveness, a world where fear does not win the day and cause us to arm ourselves against the other but where graciousness and compassion and self-sacrifice for the sake of the other is what is given, generously, graciously.

That's why we should and why we do as a church from generation to generation proclaim and celebrate God's goodness, compassion, graciousness and love. Can you imagine a group of people gathered together to ensure that that is

what is celebrated and promoted and multiplied in this world? Well, welcome to the church cause that's the whole idea. Generations upon generations who recount the generosity of a God of love and proclaim the generosity of this God of love and manifest the generosity of this God of love even and especially in the face of sorrows and sufferings of this world. Generations of generosity, the young the old and the in between, the past and the future and the here and now, generations upon generations of generosity because of the experience of and the commitment to a generous God. That is the faith of the church, that is the work of the church.

And that is our theme for our fall Stewardship drive as we ask one another to support our church family with a pledge for the coming year, as Penny talked about, we put into practice generosity of ourselves to our generous community that places at its center a generous, generous God.

Let me just share in closing something about this generous community. We told many of you about our Welcome Home project inspired and funded in honor of Marsha Lamson who was devoted to connecting our church community with the wider town. A bunch of us in the church are making bread and bringing it and some information about the town and the church to people who are new to town. We've gone out there and knocked on doors and said "our church just wants to welcome you to your new home and here's some info about our town and here's some fresh baked bread and we also have some information about our church if you'd like it." We've gone out to about 18 homes thus far and fortunately found 15 or 16 of them home and without exception we have experienced the people who come to their doors being really touched and grateful. It's about hospitality

and generosity and it's what we are called to as followers of a hospitable and generous God.

Let us work to be a generation that is particularly generous. God knows we benefit from the generosity of generations before us so let us be the generous ones whose gift of ourselves now blesses those who are still to come and follow us, proclaiming that at the heart of the world, no matter what current event seems to tell a different story, that the God who created us and whose heart beats at the heart of this world is a God of goodness, compassion, generosity and love. Amen!