

## Worship and Generosity

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Year A: Pentecost 18: Ezekiel 18 & Psalm 25

September 30/October 1, 2023

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? <sup>3</sup>As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. <sup>4</sup>Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. <sup>25</sup>Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? <sup>26</sup>When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. <sup>27</sup>Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. <sup>28</sup>Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. <sup>29</sup>Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? <sup>30</sup>Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. <sup>31</sup>Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup>For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

Psalm 25:1-9 <sup>1</sup>To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

<sup>2</sup>O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

<sup>3</sup>Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

<sup>4</sup>Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

<sup>6</sup>Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

<sup>7</sup>Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness’ sake, O LORD!

<sup>8</sup>Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

<sup>9</sup>He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

*When we worship we remember who God is and who we are. Worship fills a need that God created within us. We lift up our hands. We long to be in God’s presence. We rest in God’s steadfast love and mercy. We ‘turn and live.’ Being in God’s presence opens our hearts to be generous.*

To you, O Lord we lift up our souls! We lift up our souls in praise and worship of you this holy day. Amen.

Video of Pr Carlos: Grandpa “Pops” would always take the best wheat from the center part of the field. Other farmers would take the outer strip from around the edges as their

gift to the church. But Pops would take the best wheat from the center of the field as his gift to God. This is what generosity means. Giving joyfully, and giving generously.

Thank you, Pr Carlos for your story about Pops. Indeed, his actions were all about generosity. Taking the best wheat from the field was also an act of worship. Pops understood that it was God who had provided the grain, the sun, and the rain to grow the crop. From God comes everything that we have, everything that we are, everything always. It is in that spirit and understanding that we come to worship each week.

Listen to a few quotes about worship. Martin Luther: To gather with God's people in united adoration of the Father is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer.

Brother Lawrence: To worship God in truth is to recognize Him for being who He is, and to recognize ourselves for what we are.

Matt Redman: The heart of God loves a persevering worshipper who, though overwhelmed by many troubles, is overwhelmed even more by the beauty of God.

Have you ever been overwhelmed in worship by the beauty of God? Ever had an experience of feeling small and humble in the presence of God's glorious greatness? Have we ever shared a laugh, song or cry together in worship that brought us closer as brothers and sisters in Christ? What about singing, "Let there be peace on earth" at the end of Easter worship?

The first commandment God gave to Moses and the ancient Hebrews was: You shall have no other gods. Which means, "We are to fear, love and trust God above all things." (Martin Luther's explanation)

In order to be in awe of God, love God and trust God, it is good, right and salutary that we worship together! For worship is about God, it is not about us. 'To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul,' says the Psalmist.

Worship of God takes our eyes off ourselves. We need to worship because our sinful nature wants so desperately to believe that we are in control, have all the answers and can accomplish all things independent from God. Yet, God created us to need God, to crave God....to need worship. Worshipping God then reminds us of our place in the world as fallen yet redeemed sinners.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. The lifting up of hands is an ancient prayer practice demonstrating dependance upon God and receptivity to God. The lifting of chest with straight spine to open up our soul also opens us to worship.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. I'm inviting us to say this short verse five times together. As you speak it, begin to pray it and see how you feel at the beginning and any movement in your spirit as we repeat it. "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul." (five times)

Isn't it amazing to worship God Almighty? What a gift, what a fellowship we have with our creator, redeemer and sustainer; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We sometimes tease that we come to church only for the doughnuts and coffee. Yet we all know that our week just isn't the same when we can't be here with God. For in worship we find inspiration, food for the journey, forgiveness of sins. Take your index finger and draw a circle 8 in the air. The lower half of the 8 is everything at church centered on God: God's Word, Holy Communion, hearing the absolution of our sins. It refreshes and restores our souls so that we can go back into God's world to serve.

The top circle of the number 8 is our time away from corporate worship. We learn, grow, serve, get tired and hungry, do our jobs, feed our children and study our lessons. By the time Saturday rolls around, we are ready to be filled again by God through corporate worship.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul...make me to know your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Anytime we lift up our souls, we worship God. The sight of a stunning flower can cause great rejoicing of spirit. The hug of a grandchild can feel like a hug from God. The strains of violins or the beat of timpani's can inspire us to offer a silent prayer to God for the gift of music. Each breath we take is given only by God's power in our lungs...an act of necessity for life and of worship of God.

Here's one other quote about worship from Paul David Tripp. You cannot divide human beings into those who worship and those who don't. Everybody worships; it's just a matter of what, or whom, we serve.

Which brings us to the topic of giving...of being generous. Remember Pr Carlos' story about Pop and the other farmers? Pop was faithful to give the very best of his crop to God. The other farmers who took the outer edge of wheat were also faithful: faithful to the land, faithful to their vocation, even faithful to the church. But there was a very different emphasis between Pop's understanding of generosity and the other farmers.

It's long been a sermon illustration to say, "Take a look in your checkbook and you'll realize who and what you serve." Perhaps since no one writes checks anymore, we could revise it. "Take a look at your bank statement." Are we serving the gods, small letter g, of entertainment? Food? Automobiles? Education? If we were to look at our statements what would it reveal? What are you and I worshipping?

In the first lesson from today, the prophet *Ezekiel challenges those who think they cannot change because of what their parents were and did, or who think they cannot reverse their own previous behavior. God insistently invites people to turn and live.*

(<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources/2023-10-1/2432#texts>)

"Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup>For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live."

Ezekiel encourages us to return to the Lord. To trust only in God. In God is the fullness of life we all desire. Turn, then, and live!

Each of our dollar bills says, "In God we Trust." It was first added to our currency in 1864 at the beginning of the Civil War. Religious sentiment was increasing. People wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase and it was printed on the first coin. (<https://time.com/4179685/in-god-we-trust-currency-history/>)

For we Christians, can it be an act of worship to use our money? Can it be an act of worship that every time we spend a dollar or give a dollar away to a worthy cause, we trust that God will take care of us? Of course, God asks us to be thoughtful caretakers of our finances. But what if, what if paying our groceries was an act of worship? What would it feel like to offer a prayer of thanksgiving when we paid that expensive energy bill instead of complaining about it? "Thank you God, you've provided enough for my household once again."

When we give a gift to church or to a non-profit we trust...does it feel the same or different than paying a bill? Do we trust God with our money and finances? Or is it another item in our lives that we'd prefer to have complete control over without any of God's guidance? Those are simply questions for us to consider as we begin our Generosity Appeal.

How does worship of Almighty God and generosity fit together? Like a hand and glove. Like peas in a pod. Like being faithful to the One who is our very Faith. Amen.