

Fourth Sunday after Trinity

June 26, 2021

Luke 6:36-42

The first words of Jesus in this gospel passage are: be merciful as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned. Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. And finally in the 38th verse, Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you give will be the measure you get back.

5 commands, 5 promises Jesus gives to his family of disciples. We are in the midst of Luke's Sermon on the Plain- the sibling to Matthew's Sermon from the Mount. Matthew's sermon is given from on high, recalling the handing down of the law from Mt. Sinai in the Old Testament. Luke's is given instead on the plain..suggesting a level playing field and the ground of equals. Luke seems anxious to relate those words of Jesus that concern the man to man, woman to woman, day to day conduct he expects of His disciples.

And Luke chooses to end these few verses with "Give", because it is the the spirit of generosity which belongs to God's character that undergirds the previous four. The Father's generosity of spirit is carried into the world in His Son and from Him into his sons and daughters thereby nourishing the whole family of God. God's children are expected to show the character of their Father ..to imitate God.. just as

children's character is formed in large part by imitating their parents. Today, our attention turns to the character of family and how its members imitate God in their day to day conduct.

“Give and it will be given unto you, good measure pressed down and shaken together, and running over shall men give into your bosom.”

This 38th verse has time and again caught my interest, but there was always a pressing need in preparing to preach... to pursue the more familiar and leave the mystery of its meaning for another day.

Something is buried here in the rich soil of Jesus words and now is the time to dig into its meaning with you. With details that seem unfamiliar, Jesus describes the promise behind His command to give. The details belong to a metaphor for counting out corn in abundance.

The measuring of corn was a process carried out according to established tradition in Palestine. The seller, or giver of this life giving grain, crouches on the ground with the measure between his or her legs. First, he fills the measure $\frac{3}{4}$ full in a reserved kind of way. He gives it a good shake and a spin to make the corn grains settle in. Next, he fills the measure to its top and gives it yet another shake before he presses the corn together strongly with both hands. Finally, he heaps it into a cone. He taps it carefully to press the grains together and periodically bores a hole down into the pinnacle of the cone so he can pour even more corn into it until..until.. there is literally no more room for a single grain. The measure cannot hold more. This is the full measure the receiver gets; the generous gift overflows into the bosom.

The Greek word translated “bosom” in the gospel we’ve read is “kolpos”: strictly meaning the lap, and the lap in turn refers to the hollow pocket created by the fold above the belt of a Palestinian garment.

Let’s dig deeper into the Hebrew under the Greek. Recall first that in their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, the enslaved Hebrews were shown first and foremost the character of God, his compassionate mercy in freeing them. They became his children and Moses their leader.

One day, God commanded Moses to put his healthy hand into his “Heq” from the Hebrew root for “hidden place”..into the fold of his garment, and then to withdraw it. Moses hand came out leprous. God commanded him to put his hand back into the fold and then to take it out again. Moses then saw his hand made whole. From then on the hiding place, the fold in the garment above the belt, the bosom..became a metaphor for the Heart. Thereafter, Moses carried his people in the fold of his heart, because he remembered God’s miraculous power lodges there. Like a storehouse of life giving grain, this fold gave him strength to carry out his calling.

The corn grows full and tall in the plains of Iowa this time of year. Above the endless fields of waving corn stalks, thunderheads bloom in the west. The sun pours its warmth into the ground and the children of God who live there. The breeze smells green and ripe with the aroma of dark brown soil. The red silos stand steadfastly storing the life-giving grain.

This is my wife's family's home and she and I will be sown in the ground. When I first met them, in the fold of my garment, there was stuff akin to leprosy. Divorce debris, the bitter fruits of a life of impatience and selfishness, some brambles from the thicket of my upbringing. In the hollow of my heart, in my hiding place, the thorns of guilt for failing to raise my crop of children as a constant father, the pits of loneliness, and the bitter husks of disillusionment with myself in not being faithful to my calling as a priest.

To use the word slightly differently now, I came into the fold of my wife's family. I was met with the Midwestern reserve of 3/4 of acceptance first. Then, I was shaken out of loneliness and pressed together with brothers and sisters. Forgiveness was heaped into the hollow of my heart. No one judged; they did not condemn. They imitated the character of God as a family of God by their generosity of spirit.

In my brother in law, I find friendship like the bond between Jonathan and David. My tiny mother in law gives me the periodic shaking her natural children know so well. I now receive the overflowing embraces due a bridegroom when I bring my wife home. Best of all, one life-giving grain of nourishment that fell into my lap from my sister in law when she said, "I want you to see you the way God sees you..as WE see you.

Thanks be to God, whose mercy overflows, for His generosity of spirit.