

Pentecost 17B

September 16, 2018

Hymns: 235 - 571 - 312 - LAPPY #298

*Grace and peace be yours in RICH ABUNDANCE  
through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.  
Amen!*

***Third in Four Part Series: Characteristics of  
Followers of Jesus –  
JAMES 2:1-5  
JESUS' FOLLOWERS VALUE EACH SOUL EQUALLY***

Dear worshipers – valued souls of God, one and all!  
In Hollywood there is an exclusive school attended by children of movie stars, producers and directors. One day a teacher in that school asked her very privileged pupils to write a composition on the subject of poverty. One little girl started her literary piece like this: “Once there was a poor little girl. Her father was poor, her mother was poor, her nanny was poor, her chauffer was poor, her butler was poor. In fact, everybody in their great big house was very, very poor.” I don’t think that little girl had ever been exposed to anyone who was truly poor.

How about you? It reminds of a “Peanuts” cartoon by Charles Schultz many years ago. Schultz was a devout Christian as many of you living here near the Twin Cities will remember. In this particular cartoon Snoopy is shivering out in a snow storm beside an empty food dish. He looks longingly, expectantly, toward the house. Lucy comes out, and instead of putting anything in Snoopy’s

dish, Lucy simply says, **"Go, I wish you well: keep warm and well fed."** And then she turns, goes back into the house and slams the door. In the last frame you see a confused Snoopy looking toward the house, shivering and hungry and utterly baffled. I don't want to leave you baffled where Charles Schultz got those caption words from: he took them from later verses in this very chapter two of James!

**This is the one place where the teachings of Christ definitely clash with the ways of the world: how we view the poor.** The truth of the matter is we do value a person of wealth more than we do a person without wealth. Why do we do that? Is it maybe because we can picture ourselves as that person? This is only natural. We want the fine things of life ourselves and so we admire the people who have already attained them. And so we admire those who have climbed the ladder of success themselves.

All that matters is that they have what we by nature want for ourselves. And so we value them. Do they really have what we want?! Consider all the stories of self-destructive behavior on the part of those privileged! But if we can just gain the favor of people above us – it may further our own ends. They can open doors for us, spend some of their lavishness on us, give us a false feeling within - and image before others that somehow we are successful too. And so we treat them with respect. The poor can do nothing for us and so we devalue them.

Or do we treat the poor differently because they make us

feel guilty?! Who hasn't had the experience of seeing those beggars at the end of a freeway exit ramp looking for a hand-out. Sometimes we cannot avoid eye contact and afterward we feel guilty for not giving him or her a few bucks. I suspect we all have experienced that at some time or another. And then we encounter Jesus' parable about the sheep and the goats:

***"The King will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help You?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.'"*** (Matthew 25:31-46)

That's a scary parable--especially in a society that determines a person's worth on the basis of his or her bank account. But this is where the teachings of Jesus clash quite definitely with the values of society--how we view the poor. **Scripture is clear: our closeness to God is often reflected in how we treat those less fortunate than ourselves.** This is true in both the Old and the New Testaments.

For you and me to remember is this: We are beggars

before the Almighty! **God's GRACE is His giving us what we don't deserve. God's mercy is His not giving us what we do deserve.** But what do we deserve? With what words did WELS worshipers confess their sins years ago according to our old former hymnal?!: ***I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee, and justly deserve Thy temporal and eternal punishment.*** Somehow that confession of being a "poor" and "miserable" sinner strikes harder than the more modern wording in our worship confessions with their "***(I) don't deserve to be called Your child...(but rather) deserve only (Your) wrath and punishment both now and in eternity.***"

What then is our motivation for aiding the poor and downcast? The very reason is that we all are poor and downcast before God, but He lifts us up with the gift His Son. Jesus took upon Himself the rags of our sins and suffered and died on Calvary. Jesus was cast down into the depths of hell in our stead. In His suffering on the cross He endured the wrath of God and was separated from Him Whom Jesus called His loving Father – for us!

How then can we pray what's often really going on in our callused hearts when we think of the poor?:

*"We miserable owners of increasingly luxurious cars, and ever-expanding television screens, do most humbly pray that the sick may be visited, the prisoner cared for, the refugee rehabilitated, the naked clothed, the orphan housed, and that we may be allowed to enjoy our own firesides evening by evening, in peace - You can do all*

*things, O God . . . we beg, we beseech, we supplicate, we petition, we implore You to hear us. Lord, be good to us. Christ, make things easy for us. Lord, deliver us from the necessity of doing anything [ourselves].” Amen.*

Do you get the satire in that prayer--praying for the poor, but praying that God will take care of them so we won't have to bother with them ourselves? This doesn't mean that we should be constantly into giving hand outs. At times we might be called upon to do just that. The reason our federal government and other levels of government are in hock financially is that there have been endless handouts from borrowed sources and not enough hands up for people and foreign nations to help themselves.

Still our closeness to God is reflected in how we treat those less fortunate than ourselves. You came to the right place to get close to God! In fact, in the Lord's Supper, your Lord comes to you with His very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. He says to YOU: *"Take, eat! This is My body given for you. Take, drink! This is My blood shed for you and for your sins – Poor, miserable sinner! In these most common, humble, ordinary earthly elements of bread and wine – I come to you with My very body and blood! I have loved you unto death. I have worked forgiveness for you. Abide in Me, even as I abide in You!"*

And that brings us to the final thing to be said: **The mark of a follower of Jesus is to be kind and compassionate to all people, regardless of their station in life.** This is not a class warfare sermon. We are

to treat ALL persons with love and respect, and to be servant to all. This is how we best show our love for Christ. AND - Sometimes we can be just as tempted to despise those with greater wealth than ourselves. We speak about those who are "filthy rich," as if being rich itself is sinful. Maybe the biggest scum bags in your eyes are those who had it made and blew their fame and fortune. Know that rich people are sinners too – just like you and me! And that Christ died for them as well. Remember: "God so loved the WORLD – of lost sinners!

God is no respecter of persons. He shows no favoritism, no partiality, no bias, no preferences. His loving Gospel invitation embraces all nations, tribes, races, languages, social classes, economic classes, and both genders alike – and so should Christian congregations. God shows special honor to the lowly of the world to make His name great: ***"Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?"***

The inspired writer St. Paul would agree with James: ***God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him (I Corinthians 1:27-29).*** The point is that our salvation is based not on any human achievement, human wealth, or human power – but on God's grace and mercy in the blood of Jesus. Look at Jesus Himself: He was born to poor parents, born in a

barn, spent the years of His ministry without a bed of His own, and died without even the clothes He wore to His trial.

Yes, God can choose the aloof Kardashians, the fallen Kennedys and other high and mighty at one time or even still high and mighty – if only in the eyes of the world! All are poor, miserable sinners – just like you, just like me! Pray for lost souls – all lost souls! Work for the salvation of all people – rich and poor. **Followers of Jesus Value Each Soul Equally!** Amen!

*We are rich, for He was poor. Is not this a wonder?!  
Therefore, praise God evermore, here on earth and  
yonder! Amen! (CW 64, v3)*