

Returning God's Blessings

November 4, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Tyson Labuhn

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This morning we are coming to the end of our introduction to our new Vision for Our Savior's Way: "Together with God's Vision". We've preached and studied the new mission statement and we've been talking about the values which support our new vision, which are: Serving God's People, Sharing God's Love, Building God's People, Growing God's Family, Knowing God's Word and finally, what we'll be talking about today, Returning God's Blessings.

We're also celebrating All Saints Sunday, and the thought of returning God's blessings might be hard for some of us this morning. We remember those saints who have gone before us and those who are currently in our lives. However, having heard the name of a loved one at the beginning of our service, some of us are also reminded of the grief that we've experienced this year and the physical loss of a loved one that we've experienced. The loss is real because they aren't physically here with us. We might even wish that we could pick up the phone and hear their voice once again so that we might listen to what they have to say, and we could share with them what has been going on in our lives. After all, they loved us and generously gave of themselves. They helped us to see things from a different perspective and our lives were enriched by their presence. And so, while we have rejoiced that they've run their race, and can now rest from their labors, we can still miss them—wanting them to be part of our lives again, feeling

that we've already given a big part of ourselves—returning God's blessings, and not feeling very generous.

When he wrote to the Corinthian church, St. Paul knew that they were feeling anything but generous. In His first letter, he addressed those who were struggling with doubt and dealt with a lack of unity within the church. Some within the church claimed spiritual authority, some began to worship by themselves, and others simply became self-serving. Yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul's letter helped to unify the saints in Corinth and together they began to set a collection aside for those in need. But their generosity didn't last long and so in our epistle reading for today, St. Paul encourages the saints in Corinth.

St. Paul encourages giving from a joyful heart, returning God's blessings to help those who were in need—those saints in Judea who were being afflicted by a severe famine. He shares with them the surprising example of the saints living in Macedonia, who through their hardship and sacrificial giving, actually felt blessed to be able to have the privilege of returning God's blessings. Unlike the church in Corinth, they gave beyond their fair share and even in their own time of economic stress. This provided the saints in Corinth the motivation that was needed.

Today, we need to hear the Good News. Because just like back then, we can lift up various saints as examples. But truly, Jesus is our ultimate example. He has made sure that you do not have to live your life with a feeling of poverty, scarcity and loss. Our Lord Jesus Christ, though He was rich, for your sake became poor in every way, so that through His poverty and loss—losing His very life for you—you would be filled with His love and grace, and through Him be given abundant life once again. He forgives you for the times you haven't been generous. This Good News is the same message that blessed the Saints in the past as they gave out of their poverty. It blesses us as well, because of the fellowship we all have with our Lord Jesus Christ who continues to watch over us and provide us even in our times of need.

There's a story of an old man who was seen by his friends picking up pennies that he found on the street. Several of his friends wondered why he did this. It didn't matter what the penny looked like – it could be a shiny and new penny or a dull and dingy one. And it never seemed like the man was too distracted to find that penny lying on the street. For him, finding a penny was a high priority in his day. His friends even noticed that it seemed to make his day.

Finally, curiosity ran its course and a friend asked the man: “I know that you have enough money in your old age, so why do you stop whatever you are doing or wherever you are to pick up a penny? Why would you care even care about a penny lying on the ground?”

The man replied, “Every penny that I find reminds me of my true worth as a person. Many people during my lifetime viewed me like a penny. I was discarded, passed by, left in the change tray or seen as having little value. Then, one day a great man found me on the street feeling worthless and isolated. Unlike others, he viewed me differently. He saw my worth and potential. He promised to give me all he had to make sure I was taken care of. I believed he wanted to put me back into circulation so by faith I trust in Him. He engraved this truth in my heart just like others like me believe today. They are the same words you see engraved on this penny I found in the street, “In God We Trust.”

Those words, “In God We Trust” serve as a reminder of the blessing that God gives to us. Our value isn't in riches but in the One who enables us to be generous with what we have been given. Value isn't in our possessions but in the blessing of being able to return God's gifts so that others may be blessed as well. As believers, we trust in God to provide us the things that we need to support us. We know that He cares for us and helps to provide us employment, a home, and a family. His Spirit keeps us in this father and reminds us that we are never alone in our struggles.

By virtue of our baptism, we become brothers and sisters of Christ in the Kingdom of God. He gives to us His Spirit, and His Spirit

keeps us in the faith. His Spirit counsels us, reminding us that we are never alone in our struggles. Our Lord provides for us and it's out of His grace that we are able to bless others. Blessed to be part of a larger family in the church, we are blessed to have opportunities to return God's blessings and rejoice that others are helped in their time of need – whether it is helping out someone through our missions and benevolence ministries, spending time with someone mourning the loss of a loved one, or sharing our talents with others by serving others.

Our God has blessed us with the ability to rejoice “Together with His Vision”. We've also talked about the values that support our new Vision, which are serving God's people, sharing God's love, building God's people, growing God's family, knowing God's Word and returning God's blessings. We hold these values to be true here at Our Savior's Way, and in the days and month ahead we look forward to accomplishing our mission, which you all know by now which is “to glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by forming relationships, experiencing Jesus together and by sharing God's love.”

In Jesus Name, Amen.