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Psalm 96

Joy Through Making a Difference

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 96 (New Revised Standard Version)

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

This Psalm makes me happy. It makes me happy because it talks about singing and I love to sing. It makes me happy because it reminds me that God is the Creator. It makes me happy because it talks about giving thanks. It makes me happy because it talks about joy and how to share that joy with God and with others. “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.” Bring an offering… This Psalm reminds us that we give out of gratitude. We give because God first loves us. We give because God is generous with us.

I want to share with you a little bit about how I have grown in my understanding of giving to the church. When I was growing up, I was very involved in my church but I don’t remember giving to the church. I don’t remember family discussions about supporting the church financially. I would give $20 here and there, but never really got systematic and organized in my giving. I thought giving my time and my talents was enough. It wasn’t.

It was in my internship as a pastor at Oak Lawn UMC where I heard Lawson Metz talk about why he gives financially to God at his church. And I saw this man who was so well-respected in that church family share about how his faith had grown because of his generosity to the church. He talked about how his check to the church is the first check that he writes each month. He said that there were some months when at the end of the month, things were tight, but he wanted to give to God the first fruits of his income. He didn’t want to give God the leftovers, he wanted to give God the first, the best. I was convicted by Lawson Metz. I needed to be organized in my giving. I needed to give God my best.

And since that day I have written my check to the church as the first thing that I do every month. And I gave a percentage of my income, but it was not a tithe, it was not 10%. I mean I worked at the church, so I didn’t need to give God a tithe, 10%, my first fruits. I didn’t need to give God 100% of me, because I had earned that money. It was MY money. But, then the Holy Spirit came calling. The Holy Spirit showed me that I didn’t get to give less than 10% because I worked in a church, I didn’t get to give less than 10% because I volunteered at the church or vacuumed the fellowship hall or brought food to the potluck.

And then Lee and I took the class Crown financial while we were at Lovers Lane UMC. And I am so thankful for Sharon Bradley who taught Crown financial here at Greenland Hills last spring. And in Crown financial class for the first time I learned that everything that I have is God’s. It is not mine. I did not earn it. I do not deserve it. It is because of God that I have anything at all.

When I am not generous with my church, I am still trying to do things my way, not God’s. And so, Lee and I started to tithe. We tithe because it is biblical, and also because it is easy. We just move the decimal point. We give because it is all God’s. And I give because it makes me happy, it fills me with joy to be generous. Stewardship is a responsibility I have to God. What is 1/10 of my income? It is God’s money. God has trusted me to use it in a responsible way.

 And when I tithe, I join with God in what God is doing in Greenland Hills. God is moving at Greenland Hills. In a typical week at Greenland Hills, 11 Narcotics Anonymous meetings are held, 10 Kindermusik classes are held, 52 children attend Greenland Hills Preschool, 13 youth participate in youth group, 12 6th graders grow their faith in Confirmation, 22 children from preschool to 5th grade laugh and learn in Sunday School.

 There was one Sunday in October that we had so many kids in our 3rd-5th graders Sunday School class, that they had to meet outside! They did not have enough chairs in their room. God is moving at Greenland Hills.

 This May the mom of one of the Narcotics Anonymous folks had died, and it was my honor to get to know the family and to honor the life of their mom. Greenland Hills has hosted NA meetings for 16 years. Repeatedly, people at the funeral thanked me as a representative of the church for providing a safe place for so many. One person told me, “You don't know how many lives have been saved in that room.” Eleven Narcotics Anonymous meetings for 16 years equals countless lives.

 So, join me, join us, as we experience the joy of generosity. Our church is making an impact on this community. Greenland Hills is living out our purpose of transforming lives for Jesus. I have seen Jesus at this church just a few weeks ago when 25 nonprofits gathered together and $32,809 was raised by 290 shoppers. I saw Jesus when first-time shoppers Dan and Sandy Bracy thanked this church for having this event. They said that they had no idea there would be so many opportunities to make a difference in the world at Global Village Market. They experienced the joy of making a difference.

 You can’t experience the fullness of life if you don’t give. Jesus knew money is linked to our faith. When we follow Jesus, we are called to be all in. When the love of money is more important to us than God, we are not all in. This is not a new issue. There are 2,174 Bible verses about money and possessions. Jesus knew that money and possessions have the potential to be the greatest obstacle to our relationship with God. This week I was in Houston for a Conference and I stayed with one of my friends from my church growing up. She lives in a new subdivision in Spring and right next to the new subdivision was a Public Storage where they were breaking ground. So, here is this new subdivision and right next to it was a place to store all of the stuff that won’t fit in your new house. Money and possessions have the potential to be the greatest obstacle to our relationship with God.

 Jesus wants 100% of us. When we celebrate Communion together, we hear these words, “And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.”

 We are called to give according to what we have and the standard you shoot for is 10%. We should all want to grow in our giving to be more like Christ because the call to follow Jesus is an "all in" call. When we give, we participate in God’s ongoing work in the world. And we give out of gratitude. We respond to God by our generosity.

 I want to invite all of us to be a part of what God is calling us to do and be. I want to invite us all to make and grow in our commitments to God. There was once a pastor who was frustrated with his church and their lack of generosity, so as he lifted up the offering plates to the cross, he said these words, “No matter what we say or do, this is what we think of you.” Out of gratitude this is our response to God. We can experience joy through making a difference. So, are you all in?