

Mission Possible: Week 2—Gratitude and Generosity

Weekly Mission: Perform a Random (or not so Random) act of radical generosity or kindness for someone. Post pix on our facebook page or send them to Pastor Mandy

Monday, 10/19/20

Count Your Blessings (Pastor Mandy)

Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

All that we have, and all that we are, is a gift from God. God's story with us is the story of a God who provides--God provides the gifts of Creation and life, the gifts of love and purpose, work and rest. God provides food in the wilderness, light for our darkness, and hope in times of trouble.

Today, I invite you to pray Psalm 23 slowly, pausing between each line. As part of your prayer, I want to invite you to make a list of blessings. The Psalmist says "My cup runneth over." What are some blessings in your "cup"? Thank God for these blessings. Think about your "circles" of friends and family--take a look at your Facebook "friends" list or your Instagram followers or the people in your work or social circles. You may want to list the "groups" of friends/family that God has given you. Thank God for them.

Write a note of gratitude to some of these folks, letting them know how much they mean to you. You might even want to invite them to worship with us online this weekend.

Tuesday, 10/20/20

Giving Thanks in Song(Pastor Anna)

Psalm 28:7 "The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

I grew up in a family of singers. My sister and brothers have truly fine voices as do most of their children. Me? Well, I have curly hair. (Not sure what that's worth in the long run, but it is a distinguishing trait.) Yet, I love choral singing. I sang in choirs for many years, but I had to work at it in a way that my siblings did not. All the while, I never considered "song" a form of thankfulness. That is, until I took a deeper look at this Psalm.

Psalm 28 doesn't open with celebration, instead it opens to reveal a suffering poet. Here is someone who is in so much pain, so intense is their desperation, they skip the story and go directly to a plea for divine help. "Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help".

(2a)

Life's difficulties have a way of narrowing the field of vision, of isolating a person, of driving us under the covers - even stealing our song. The more intense the pain, the further away the melody. Yet, in the midst of his suffering the psalmist uses his voice to cry out to God for help. And, God hears.

Then, just as we don't know exactly what drove the psalmist to this dark place, we also don't know *exactly* how God helped. We only have the benefit of reading about his pivot toward thankfulness, from the renewal of strength, his deeper trust in God, and the return of his song.

There is something about singing that can lighten the load, regulate breathing and blood pressure, and provide a new perspective on the world. I'm not talking about "good" singing - whatever the measure for that might be. Just singing. Singing in the shower. Singing in the car. Singing alone, or with the kids, or even (awkwardly) on a Zoom call. Song is a gift. Song is a deep reminder that we are not alone. God is here with us, strengthening, empowering, breathing in and through us, changing our "cry" to melody.

Prayer: God of breath and life, breathe in me today. By the power of your Holy Spirit, turn my cries of uncertainty, desperation and loneliness into songs of joy. You alone are my strength. You alone are my redeemer. I lift my heart and soul to you now, trusting in the power of your grace. Amen.

Challenge: Find a favorite song, it doesn't matter what genre it is from. Listen to it once, thinking of all the things that make this particular one special to you. Now, play it a second time. Turn up the volume and sing! Loud! Make this song a thank offering to God.

Wednesday, 10/21/20

I Got Pumpkin'd (Pastor Melaina)

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Corinthians 9:11

It's pumpkin season! Market shelves are stocked with pumpkin spiced items. Pumpkin lattes and different pumpkin flavored coffees are trending. The smell of pumpkin flavored breads and desserts fill households. If you do not have baking ability but you can duplicate the smell of pumpkin spices through candles. This is the time of year to look for pumpkin patches to pick out your favorite pumpkin (while social distancing) to put into your favorite recipe, carve artistically, and/or share with a neighbor.

Do you know how a pumpkin gets its orange color? Pumpkins often start off green due to chlorophyll but signals from nature such as temperature, longer nights, and increased moisture in the soil allow for the carotenoids to emerge as the pumpkin ripens giving way for the orange coloring. The process is internal in relationship to nature. Just like pumpkins we too are being ripened by Holy Spirit; to be good fruit.

Speaking of sharing a pumpkin---the other day as I was pulling out of my driveway to go to the market, I noticed that there was a new addition to my front stoop/porch. There was a shiny new pumpkin that had come from some wonderful anonymous neighbor. It read, "I am thankful for..." As I drove to the market, I thought about all of the things for which I am thankful. I am thankful for the roof over my family's heads, the car to drive freely to the market, I am operating under my call (love serving others as a pastor), a pantry and refrigerator full of healthy foods, clean water to drink; healthy, smart, and energetic children, a supportive husband, money in my bank account, and the ability to take mini safe vacations to renew and restart. As I thought about all of the things to which I am thankful, my heart felt full. My heart was full reflecting on the abundance of riches that I have been given. I am rich in love and more. Yet I know out of my richness is much more; a sense that I have been given not for just my good use but for the service of others. I am fruit to be enjoyed by loving service to others.

We often think about our richness as monetary. While there can be richness there, it can also be a source that makes us extremely poor. Therefore, richness is really the generous gifts given to us by God that have been used as they are purposed. We are given gifts generously not for us but to serve and help others. The Holy Spirit is ripening us just like the pumpkin. We are being transformed from persons that are self-serving, greedy, and individualistic but through the working of the Holy Spirit we develop hearts that are generous, outward focused, and communal. From this transformation, our outward being is transformed. Our generosity is evidence to our being thankful. We are thankful to God that we were blessed to be a blessing.

My anonymous wonderful neighbor pumpkin'd me. Whoever the neighbor was gave generously and out of their thankful heart; reminding me to be thankful. The pumpkin was only a vessel of the overall message; be generous out of a thankful heart.

Listen: Hear from God through the song, "From the Inside Out" by Hillsong United

Challenge: Think about all of the gifts that you have been given and share with someone else. Go pumpkin someone else (literally and/or figuratively).

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for your generosity. Thank you for the gifts that you have graciously given to me. Give me a heart like yours; a heart that is generous in love. Help me to share these gifts of love with others as an outpouring of my thanksgiving. As my cup overflows, help me to pour into other's cups.

Thursday, 10/22/20

Blessed to be a Blessing (Pastor Mandy)

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

When God blesses, with gifts of any sort (time, aptitudes, spiritual gifts, financial blessings), those are not rewards for past service, but rather gifts that God wants to use to be a blessing to someone else. When Jesus was speaking to 5,000 hungry people, Jesus used the blessing of one persons lunch (5 loaves and 2 fish) to bless the multitudes. We're spending this week in an attitude of gratitude for the many ways God provides each day. Today, I invite you to ask how God is calling you to be a blessing to others through our Mission Possible campaign.

I invite you to light a candle for your prayer time (carefully), and try a breathing prayer. As you breathe in and out, thank God for the gift of life, and rest in the knowledge that God is God and we are not. Allow yourself to rest in this Good Father's embrace. Ask God how God would have you be a blessing to Glen Mar, to our Mission Possible Campaign, and through Glen Mar to your neighbors. Write down what you hear from God.

Friday, 10/23/20

Seeing Abundance (Pastor Anna)

Proverbs 22:9 "Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor."

Much has been made in religious circles about the power of right believing, or right living. Many groups claim to have one "true" way to approach God and to live life in relation to others. Yet, this pithy little proverb suggests there may be a way of right seeing. A way of being that rewards the one who sees when their vision is cast through a lens of abundance.

It is interesting to me that the blessing in the proverb falls to the one who has a "bountiful eye". Perhaps it's kind of like that glass half empty/full thing. Where the glass and the level of the water are the same, only the perspective shifts. Yet, in this illustration, perspective is everything. It's the perspective that informs both attitude and action.

When we begin to view the world through the lens of God's provision, through the lens of abundance and not scarcity, we are motivated to share with others. When we trust God to provide for that next job, relationship, meal, or opportunity we are free. Free of the fear and insecurity that controls our thoughts and our attitudes. Free to respond generously to others. After all, giving is first of all a measure of trust - not in the receiver, but in the supplier.

Prayer: Generous God, you who give yourself so freely, help me to see the abundance you have already provided today. Help me to see you with clear eyes. Help me to trust you to provide for all of my needs. Give me this "bountiful eye", the eye that sees your abundance everywhere I turn. Give me a bountiful heart, one that gives freely to others as I place my trust in you. Amen.

Challenge:

Step one: Open that tee shirt drawer, sweater bin or other clothing collection point and start counting.

Step two: Give thanks for each item you find. Even if it's worn out, never worn or can't wear anymore.

Step three: Ask yourself, which of these would be a blessing to someone else?

Step four: Take those item(s) and bless someone else.

Saturday, 10/24/20

The Grateful Sparrow (Pastor Melaina)

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so...” Psalm 107:1-2a

One of the first hymns that I learned to sing (terribly—I might add) is Eye on the Sparrow. It is a popular hymn across denominations and is one of the most influential and heavily recorded hymn/gospel songs. My favorite part to sing is “I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free.” There is a freedom emoted when the notes of this section leave your vocal cords. While I love the song, I never really pondered the sparrow. I simply accepted the words as they were without much pondering. Why is the sparrow singing with happily? Because the sparrow was once a caged bird that is now free. Why wouldn’t the caged bird sing when set free? A creature that was born to fly that had been caged would be grateful when set free to fly as purposed. The sparrow is free to feel the wind dance on their wings, to feel the warmth of the sun kiss their feathers, to perch from tree to tree, and to just be.

Interestingly enough my very first novel that I read was, I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou (one of my all-time favorite authors). The caged bird was Maya Angelou who desired freedom from the difficulties of her childhood. So, a caged bird sings for freedom and the free sparrow sings out of gratitude for becoming free. The sparrow sings because of the generosity of the one who freed it and its praise of thanksgiving is its song of freedom.

We are the sparrow who has been set free by the Lord because God’s “good and steadfast love ensures forever.” We are the redeemed sparrow who can sing thanksgiving to our generous Lord for setting us free through grace. Through the saving grace we are set free to fly in the life that we are purposed. Our song of freedom is an act of thanksgiving to be a witness to freedom. Since we were once caged birds and now grateful sparrows, we share our song to free other caged birds. We use our freedom to free others so that they too can sing. For the generous gift of freedom that was given to us, our hearts are full of joy, praise, and gratitude, and that gratitude bubbles over into songs that liberate others.

In Henry Nouwen’s You Are Beloved, he warns against generosity that is not rooted in thanksgiving. Generosity that is not rooted in thanksgiving and love, becomes manipulation to receive affection or support. But true generosity has love as its foundation. “When you know yourself as fully loved...you will be a free person that is free to love. Love is the root note of the sparrow’s song. The sparrow so loves because it was loved first. The generosity of God who watches over us. Why would we not sing and want others to join the song?”

Challenge: Sing Sparrows!! ---Journal 10 people that you are grateful for and think of people that you have made a difference to and are grateful for having had the opportunity to do so. Reach out to those persons and share your thankfulness for their impact on your life/faith journey.

Listen: We all have a favorite rendition of “Eye on the Sparrow.” Hear from God as you listen to “Eye on the Sparrow.”

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for watching over us. You know each and every one of us and love us. Your love sets us free; to love you and to love each other. Help us to show our gratitude through our service to others. Amen