

Text: Mark 10:17-31  
Theme: "Living In Gratitude"  
#975

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Pentecost 21B  
October 14, 2018

WELCA Thank Offering Sunday

*I'm sharing a story titled "The Horse and the Mule," adapted from an old fable attributed to Aesop.*

*A man set forth on a journey with his horse and a mule both carrying a heavy load. As he traveled along the plain, the horse carried his load with ease, but when he began to climb the mountain, his load was more than he could bear. "I beg you," the horse whispered to the mule, "relieve me by accepting a small portion of my load."*

*The mule shook his head, "Each of us has been assigned a task. You carry your load and I will carry mine."*

*Shortly after their conversation, the horse fell to the ground dead. The man took the load carried by the horse and placed it on the mule. In addition, he skinned the horse and added the hide to the load carried by the mule.*

*Groaning under his heavy load, the mule said to himself, "If I had only been willing to assist the horse a little, I would not have to bear his entire burden."*

Today we are celebrating the ministry of the Women of the ELCA here at Zion. We celebrate the ways the women have led us all in sharing

the load of ministry and of the ways they have taught us all about service and about giving. We celebrate their selfless ways that lead them to work hard in the service of the Gospel, sharing the work of Jesus Christ in so many ways. And we celebrate the ways God has blessed us all with gifts and talents to use in the ministry we all share through Christ.

The Fall Supper we just enjoyed involved a lot of work and a lot of volunteer time and money. The Fall Supper is a great project that the whole church plugs into—we even had our new Youth Leader, Tyler, working! Serving over 575 guests the women take in a lot of money! Then later they get together to decide where the money goes! They give it all away. This year the women proposed to give over \$6,600 to more than 25 non-profit charities! That is an amazing statement of generosity and thankfulness!

Women also get together on Monday mornings during the fall, winter, & spring **to make quilts** to be distributed to our HS seniors, area food shelves, victims of fires, and to Lutheran World Relief which sends them around the world.

There is so much that goes on around here that the women just do—and they are always ‘doing’ for the work of Jesus Christ. It’s just a part of their nature to do these things.

But the question that is asked in our Gospel today gets us to thinking about the ‘why’ we do what we do. Do the women (and all of us for that matter) do or give ***in order that*** we receive? Do we give our time and use our God-given talents, as well as the money we have, to further the Kingdom of God, or do we give in order to receive some sort of a return on our giving? Do we give so that God will love us and welcome us into the Kingdom? Do we give in order that we receive something in return?

It’s interesting to note that this Gospel text falls right on the heels of our reading last Sunday. Jesus taught the disciples that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who receive it as a child. Children are the lowest on the totem pole in a patriarchal society and so what they receive is a gift—pure and simple. They can’t earn what they are given, it comes as a gift—a blessing.

Today we learn of a wealthy man who asked Jesus ‘*what he must do*’ to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds by basically saying, “You know the rules; obey the commandments God has given us.” The man countered that he felt he had kept them all from his youth. That’s quite a statement! How many of us would dare claim that?!

Jesus looked at him and loved him. Then Jesus added, “You lack one thing; go sell what you own and give the money to the poor.” Jesus

wanted the man to change his thinking from 'I have done this myself,' to discovering what it is to be dependent on God for everything. The man was confident and self-reliant to the degree that he thought he had done all that was necessary to earn his way to heaven. Asking Jesus what more he could do was basically looking for a pat on the back—"you've done it all already; don't worry about it."

But Jesus knowingly added conditions that the man would not fulfill. Jesus was essentially teaching him (and us) that **we can never do enough** to earn our way to heaven. Our good works will never leave us feeling like we did it ourselves.

So what is the difference between seeing the Kingdom of God as a gift, or seeing it as a reward? When we stop to think about the grace of God in Christ, that we are freed of our sin and are given the Kingdom as a gift, then our response is one of gratitude. We respond to the gift with gratitude and joy that we have been given the Kingdom.

How can we, then, live our lives and use our gifts to benefit others? Do we share what God has entrusted, or loaned, to us with gratitude and generosity, or do we give as it will benefit us in some way?

Our women today remind us of the joy of giving and sharing our blessings with others. Their work is all for the Kingdom and the glory of

God. They let us in on that joy today as we celebrate all that they do for God and for God's people.

The Gospel ends in an interesting exchange between Jesus and the disciples. They acknowledge that they have left a lot to follow Jesus. They have given more than they realize at that moment. And Jesus acknowledges that truth. They have stuck with Jesus through some difficult times, but there is more to come as Jesus approaches Jerusalem and the cross.

Remembering that what we do will never be enough, and remembering all that Jesus has done for us, we joyfully give thanks for what we have been able to do and the loving grace we have been given. Hearts filled with gratitude is our response to God's blessings in our lives.

AMEN

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