

Father's Good Pleasure

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Lk 12:32-40

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On August 3rd, a young white male opened fire on 2,000 shoppers
in a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas.

22 people were murdered.

27 people were shot but survived.

He was targeting Hispanics.

The next day, August 4th, a young white male opened fire on a crowd in downtown Dayton, Ohio
killing 9 people, including his own sister.

He kept a list of people he would kill and fantasized about guns.

Last weekend in Chicago,

7 people were killed and 52 wounded by gunfire from Friday evening to Sunday.

*There were 32 separate shooting incidents throughout the weekend, the police said.*¹

Even distanced by miles and culture and good neighbors

some here are in fear, wondering what we Americans have come to,
looking for solutions to ease our anxieties.

This past weekend also,

I took time to write my memories of Holy Cross Lutheran Church
who will be celebrating their 50th anniversary this fall.

Holy Cross is the church of my childhood.

It was a merging of three congregations

of three different denominations, three different cultures and three different polities.

They were a merge of necessity

and it was very difficult and tumultuous

at a time of my own faith formation and adolescent development.

As I sat through those years of confirmation

and listened to the grown-ups fight and complain and criticize,

I pondered the nature of church and the character of God.

My role models were

my Sunday school teachers,

Mrs. Bush, Mr. Stansbury, Mrs. Ausen,

Pastor Esse whose strict upright character drew the ire of members

who wanted some leeway in their sinful craven desires,

and men like Mr. Ausen and Mr. Bartz

who took an interest in some of us teens just because they cared.

As I wrote my memories of my childhood church

I was aware that history records dates of events and names of leaders,

but what mattered most to me,

what made a difference in my life,

what shaped my faith and led me to this work I now do,

is the people who cared.

What I remember most of Holy Cross Lutheran Church

are the names of people who took time for me.

Last Friday's edition of the Star Tribune

has an article written by a policewoman from Lake Elmo.²

Out of 27 years as arson investigator and investigator of homicides and assaults,

she has come to recognize patterns of behavior that lead to violence.

¹ Julie Bosman, "Chicago Has Its Worst Weekend of Gun Violence in 2019 as 7 Are Killed"
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/us/chicago-violence-guns.html> accessed 8/9/2019.

² Erika Christensen, "I'm a cop and I've met the next mass shooter," *Star Tribune*, Friday, August 9, 2019, p.A7.

She wrote of two children in a case she is currently working
 and the patterns she sees repeated.
 They are called “throwaway children.”
 They are “throwaways” because they have no value to anyone,
 no one who cares about them,
 blight and eyesore like some fast-food trash in the ditch, thrown away.

And they feel it.
 Asked why they burned down a playground,
 the younger boy said “No one cares about me and I was bullied,”
 bullied on that playground and no one cared to do anything about it,
 no one cared about him.

Christensen writes,
*You build your life, your beliefs and find your path
 through what you are taught and shown.
 If you are taught hate, you will hate, yourself and others.
 If you are taught respect, you will respect, yourself and others.
 If pain is inflicted upon you, you will inflict pain upon others.*³

You see why church is so important.
 You see why *Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church* is so important.
 Parents are not enough for raising children.
 Parenting is not enough for creating stable, productive citizens.
 Children need many adults in their lives
 adults who care, who take time for them,
 who sincerely desire children be happy and whole.

We take assessment of our church,
 who is in worship, how many attend and is it fewer than last year,
 we note who is no longer with us,
 we fret about money and of losing “big givers,”
 we want more members,
 we talk about church building issues,
 and whether worship is “meeting our needs,”
 and getting enough volunteers.

And all the while,
 what *really* matters,
 what really makes a *difference*,
 what is at the heart of a stable society and a safer America,
is adults taking time to care for children besides their own.

Church is a natural place for this to happen.
This church is the natural place to shape lives and save people.

In the gospel reading,
 Jesus is in the middle of teaching his followers about God’s *kingdom*,
 God’s rule and ways that are now coming about.
 Jesus is training them for a lifestyle that is God’s kingdom.
 He describes God’s essential character,
 the core of God’s being that drives this kingdom.
 “It is your Father’s *good pleasure* to give you the kingdom...”
 God’s giddy delight,
 hopping like a kid giving a Mother’s day gift he made himself,
 dancing and skipping, unable to contain the joy until gift is opened,
 God’s *pleasure* in giving to you the kingdom’s treasure
 that gives life, makes good, loves pure, brings joy.

³ Ibid.

God *wants* you to be happy and content.
 That is the *vision of God*,
 the image of God Jesus describes.
 It begins with God who gives.
 God gives what you need.
 No work, no earning, no decision or choosing.
 God opens the store and gives to us first.
 It begins with what you *believe* about God,
 about who God is,
 about what God can do.
 And then, since God is generous and giving,
 we can be too.
 It begins with what you *believe about God*.
 Every wise person knows that all we have is really God's gift.
 We come in to this world with nothing, a squalling helpless infant.
 We are nurtured, invested with love, given shelter and food, unable to do for ourselves.
 We are placed in a country with existing laws and cooperative institutions.
 We are given opportunities and guidance and schooling.
 So whatever we become, whatever path we choose, whatever success we achieve
 behind it all is the tremendous investment of time, love, money and effort
 of God, parents, teachers, mentors and innumerable unnamed servants.
 Every wise person knows
 that every success and possession and achievement
 is really a gift from God.
 Every wise person knows
 we don't really "own" anything,
 that everything is really a gift on loan for a time
 to do with as will most please God.
 So what do we have to lose?
 It is God's gift in the first place.
 Generous people know that all they have is really gift
 and so generous people can *share* because it really is no personal loss to give.
 I am not diminished by giving richly
 because it's not mine to start with anyway.
It is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom...
God gives so that I might give.

Then the biting verse,
 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
 What matters most to us is what will be fought for hardest.
 It's a matter of the heart.
 It's a matter of the heart's desire.
 So when it comes to sharing church building,
 when it comes to worship preferences,
 when it comes to budget cuts and financial reports,
 what are we saying about where our treasure is?
 What are we saying is most important to us?
 What are we saying about God's generosity and good pleasure?
 When the conversation is about "keeping what we like"
 it is not about sharing what God has given.
 When attention is on "what's in it for us"
 it is not on young boys who say "No one cares about me,"
 it is not on young girls who crave affection.

This summer the 3-Church Discernment team has been meeting and working hard
 on whether this idea of shared space is even viable and how might it work.

Our three congregations have not even gotten to the step of deciding whether to commit.
 The sharing of space is an interesting idea
 and the team's efforts this summer are certainly worthy,
 but I have gnawing frustration that it seems an exercise of convenience and cost-saving
 instead of a necessary collaboration for effectively addressing
 the real, immediate needs of people in Bossen Park, Hiawatha and next door.
 We have yet to talk about what God is asking of Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church,
 how we are to be a vital resource and service to this corner of the city,
 more than just a place of worship for our members.

For instance, we have a very good ministry for children and youth,
 raising them in a nurturing, loving community of many caring adults,
 but most are *our own* children,
 already connected to loving families here.
 Our faith formation ministry across all ages
 is very good at teaching and giving experience of God's love and goodness.
 You should be proud of your discipleship ministry!
 But now, can it be extended to be for "throwaway children" too?
 Can it be shaped for children who are not among us, not like us?
 And how can we nurture and shape the lives of our adult neighbors?
 Not necessarily for making them members of our church,
 or even making them Lutheran Christians,
 but how can we shape their worldviews and assumptions
 that reflect God's ways and improve our communities?
 Church has a role to give a different narrative and a different perspective
 than the craven, selfish attitudes so prevalent,
 than the mischaracterization and fallacies spouted as alternative truth.
 Church has a role in society to promote the best in one another
 and to be a means of bringing about the best in our communities.

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock,
 for it is your Father's giddy pleasure to give you the kingdom.
 So sell your possessions and give."
 Don't be afraid of letting go, of letting something different happen,
 and *give* because that is how we be church,
 that is how we are God's people.
 We have what we need to prevent future mass shootings.
 Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church has what is needed to reclaim "throw-away children."
 We have what is needed to make a difference.
 We have the adults who care
 and the partners we need.
 God is generous.
 God gives what we need.