



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Trinity Sunday

June 11, 2017

“Reckless Generosity”

(Gen. 1:28)

Rev. David K. Groth

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (Gen. 1:28).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Do you remember a time when you were shocked by how much responsibility was being given you? Maybe it was the time as a youngster on the farm your dad said, “Drive the tractor around back, hook up the hay wagon and meet me in the front field.” You tried to look casual about it as if you had been doing it all your life, but it was a big deal.

Or maybe it was your first baby sitting job, when the well-being of these two dearly loved kids was entrusted to you. Or maybe it was when a powerful hunting rifle was first placed into your hands. I still remember when dad gave me the chainsaw and said, “Your turn.” Shouldn’t there be a book to read and a test to pass before you use one of those things?

In the Genesis account of creation, in six days he made this universe, and this planet, and filled it with an extraordinary menagerie of living creatures. And then he does the most remarkable thing. He steps back and in essence, hands it over to us. “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” He puts them “in the garden to work it and keep it” (2:15). He entrusts it to us, and expects we’ll use good judgment and exercise self-control and be stewards of his creation. He expects we’ll pass it on to the next generation in good condition. We are given original responsibility. That is, before there is any mention of original sin or guilt, God gives us original responsibility.

Clearly, God never gave us permission to exploit his creation to the demise of future generations. It was never God’s will that we abuse his creation any more than you

would want your child to be taking your car off road for a joy ride. Nevertheless, the possibility, even probability of accident and abuse, does not prevent God from, in effect, handing over the keys.

He puts in checks and balances, the law on our hearts and the law of government to protect us from the worst of abusers. And have you ever considered that one reason why God commanded us to rest on the Sabbath was not just for our own good, but also for that of his creation? He gives it a rest from our strip mining and tree sawing and concrete pouring and paving and burning. It was meant to be a built-in way to help preserve his good creation.

Still, it's remarkable how much freedom he gives us, and with that: responsibility. With his beautiful creation, in effect he says, "Here, this is for you, for you to use and enjoy. Take good care of it. Be a steward of it." That's reckless generosity. He gives us more responsibility than we might be ready for.

Remember the first miracle of Jesus? It was at a big old wedding in Cana of Galilee. They ran out of wine, a major faux pas in that culture, disaster even. The wine is gone, but the guests aren't. The groom is ashamed and embarrassed, his mother is frantic, the bride is in tears. Seeing it unfold, Mary turns to her son and says, "You know, it'd be nice if you did something about this." At first Jesus demurs, but then changes his mind. In the end Jesus turns about 150 gallons of water into very fine wine. That's about 750 bottles! Reckless generosity! He doesn't lecture them on making good decisions. He said all that before in Moses and the prophets. In any event, any God who turns that much water into wine is also quite willing to entrust us with a lot of responsibility, perhaps more than we're ready for. He trusts that we'll use good judgment and exercise self-control and moderation and be responsible for ourselves and even for one another, that we'll be our brother's keeper.

Reckless generosity. In the same way, he also gives us our spouses and trusts that we'll love and respect them, care for them, protect them, and be faithful to them. When

we're first married we know what a tremendous blessing God has given us with our spouses. And we also know it well at the very end, because it will feel like one half of you has been severed and also buried. But in those in between times, too easily we forget.

Reckless generosity. God also entrusts even infants to our care. Shouldn't there be a book to read and a test to pass before you're given one of those? They're so small, so vulnerable, so dependent and impressionable. And they are his, really. He made them. They are baptized into his name. But again, ready or not, God hands them over to us, to us maladjusted parents every one of us! Yet he trusts we'll take care of them and be compassionate and patient, slow to anger, quick to forgive. He trusts we'll love them and teach them to know and love him.

Reckless generosity. The average household income in Watertown is \$60,520 dollars. Again, that's the average household income, not the average per working person. But that means in just 17 years, the average Watertown family is responsible for over a million dollars. God entrusts us to make good decisions about how we spend it, save it, and how we give it away. Ready or not, God gives us a lot of freedom and responsibility for how we will use our resources, our time, our money, our skills and education.

We have a God who gives to us generously, and with his gifts he gives us freedom (a lot of it), and responsibility.

God's greatest gift to us was the gift of himself. So good, so humble, so vulnerable and humble, meek even. That too was an act of reckless generosity, reckless love. Were we ready for that gift?

Not one little bit. We beat him up, and then we killed him. We crucified him. Before that we ignored him, argued with him, tried to entrap him. The Father knew this would happen, but did it prevent him from sending his Son? And did it prevent the Son from coming? Do you recognize the MO? It's the same one who stepped back and gave us his good creation: "Here, this is for you." It's the same one who gave us our spouses. "Love her Hosea, even as I the

Lord your God love my people Israel” (Hosea 3). It’s the same one who gave us our children: “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD” (Ps. 127:3). It’s the same one who gave us our jobs and our income. Ecclesiastes 5, “When God gives man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God” (v. 19). It’s the same God who turned 150 gallons of water into very fine wine (Jn. 2:1-12).

Reckless generosity. Similarly, God has given us his Word. He has made you and me, imperfect people riddled by doubt and plagued by confusion, he has made you and me custodians of the message. Psalm 145, “One generation will declare your works to the next and tell of your mighty acts” (v. 4). Parents, maybe your ancestors have been Christian for hundreds of years; maybe a thousand years or more. How tragic it would be if it all ended with this generation.

Reckless generosity. So much can go wrong, but that doesn’t stop him from giving. He gives us his promises in our baptisms. If we want, we can write it off as a rite of passage, or we can rejoice in the promise that through baptism, we’re God’s own children.

Reckless generosity. He gives us the Lord’s Supper, and if we want we can go through the motions. Many do. Or, we can receive it as the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

Reckless generosity. He promises to hear and answer our every prayer, and if we want, we can neglect that gift, underutilize it. Most of us do. But whenever we’re ready to turn our attention to him in prayer, he is already there, listening.

Reckless generosity. He gives his church the keys to the kingdom. “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven” (Jn. 20:22). If we want, we can say, “I don’t buy that. Who needs the church anyway?” Or we can rejoice in that promise and the forgiveness it delivers.

Reckless generosity. Why isn’t the Lord smarter about his giving? Why does he keep throwing, as we would

say, good money after bad? The answer: he loves us, loves taking care of us, loves giving gifts to us, and desires that not one should be lost, but is intent of saving us. The economics of it all make no sense, but that's the nature of grace. God's generosity and grace always has a scent of scandal to it. Whether at the dawn of creation, or at Cana, or at this baptismal font or at the altar or at the gates of heaven, the Lord's grace always carries with it the scent of scandal. Why? Luther wrote it's mostly because man wants his own efforts to count for something. "Is that not putting it plainly enough? Yet it does no good; for when people hear their effort will have no value [when it comes to their salvation], then everything is over . . . They simply will not have their deeds [their good works] condemned (What Luther Says, 567).

Luther also wrote, "Hunger is a good cook. . . Whoever sits at a table and is hungry relishes all; however, he who is already satisfied relishes nothing but is filled with loathing even for the most excellent food" (Ibid, 563). The point: if we are already filled up with self-righteousness, then we have no appetite for God's grace and are, in fact, turned off by it. However, if we know we are sinners through and through, and are in fact, dead in our sin; and if we know that our only hope for salvation is by God's grace, then the Gospel tastes so good, and you can hardly get enough of it..

Reckless generosity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created us, redeemed us, and called us to be his own. Through it all, he gives us great gifts, and great freedom for how we use those gifts, and great responsibility too. And though each of us has been careless and irresponsible, still, he doesn't turn the spigot off. He keeps giving and giving and giving. Thanks be God. Amen.

