

Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness,[a] we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. 3 But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, 4 endurance produces character, and character produces hope. 5 This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

6 While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. 7 It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for a good person. 8 But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Psalms 100

Shout triumphantly to the Lord, all the earth!

2 Serve the Lord with celebration!

Come before him with shouts of joy!

3 Know that the Lord is God—

he made us; we belong to him.[a]

We are his people,

the sheep of his own pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanks;

enter his courtyards with praise!

Thank him! Bless his name!

5 Because the Lord is good,

his loyal love lasts forever;

his faithfulness lasts generation after generation.

Matthew 9:35-10:8

35 Jesus traveled among all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. 36 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. 38 Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest."

10 He called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to throw them out and to heal every disease and every sickness. 2 Here are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, who is called Peter; and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee; and John his brother; 3 Philip; and Bartholomew; Thomas; and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananaean;[a] and Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

5 Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, "Don't go among the Gentiles or into a

Samaritan city. 6 Go instead to the lost sheep, the people of Israel. 7 As you go, make this announcement: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons. You received without having to pay. Therefore, give without demanding payment.

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer:
Amen.

“You received without having to pay, so give without demanding payment.” This is the story of creation. God created all that is, from the Amazon Rainforest to the Sahara Desert, from the Mississippi River to Mount Kilimanjaro, from gnats to great white sharks and earthworms to elephants, without demanding any payment from the creatures. Instead, God sets in motion lifecycles of constant giving. Rain gives water to streams, streams to rivers, rivers to oceans, oceans to clouds, and clouds to rain. Insects are eaten by reptiles, which are eaten by mammals, and when they die, are eaten again by insects. No one pays for this, not with money, but instead gives life to new life when the time comes.

“You received without having to pay, so give without demanding payment.” Certainly, in our medical system driven by profit margins at insurance companies, we pay to give birth. But no child has paid for their birth. They were given life without any payment demanded. Each of you came into existence not of your own will or work, but because someone else chose to carry you for about nine months and give you life, all without demanding rent. Room and board for nine months at Radford University this coming school year is about \$9,000. My mom surely didn't charge me that!

“You received without having to pay, so give without demanding payment.” We make a category mistake every time we say we're paying our respects to the dead or paying our dues to the living. Human relationships as God intended them are not about capitalism, not about paying anyone anything. When we attend funerals, we give our time, our grief, and our memories to the deceased and to God. Jesus shares with the disciples a way of

being that's about kingdom impact rather than today's profits,
about justice for all rather than accumulating as much as I can.
About giving rather than receiving.

Now, for those who might hear this and try to find a way around the difficulty of the Gospel, let's remember that receiving without paying isn't Christian code for petty theft. Jesus didn't allow the disciples to walk out of the grocery store with an unpurchased pack of gum in their pockets. Nor is receiving without paying an image of inheritance, where someone has a legal right to the money or the estate after the parents' passing. When Jesus talks about receiving without paying, it's an absolute reference to a gift, not stolen, nothing owed, but given with the kind of anticipation that brings great joy to both the recipient and the giver. Given like a first kiss in a blossoming relationship, with hope, and passion, but no demand for payment. Just a hope that one will be given in return.

Nearly every time someone making a lot of money chooses to go somewhere else to make even more money - think professional athletes, CEO/CFO, business consultants - you'll likely hear something along the lines of, "I'm going to get what's mine." I'm not begrudging anyone getting paid, especially when professional athletes make millions to the team owners billions, but the simple truth is that "getting what's mine" is antithetical to the Christian project. We're not meant for a lifestyle of protecting our personal assets, of building barns or weaving safety nets, of getting more of what we think we deserve, because God's economy isn't based on transactions. God's economy isn't based on what we can afford to pay. God's economy is based on giving.

I'll never forget the moment my brother was given his first car. My parents bought him a used Mercury Cougar, a two door coupe in navy blue. As we walked onto the patio off of our five foot tall front porch and turned into the driveway, he saw the car, and then

jumped the height of that porch. That's when I knew that Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson were wrong. In that moment, white men could jump. To be fair, Matt also injured himself playing basketball and nearly had to delay his entrance into West Point, so jumping wasn't something he normally did very well. But the point is, that car was an unpaid for, undeserved gift, something that a teenage Matt could have never procured on his own.

In Christ, God gives to us something we could never properly afford on our own: righteousness, which is among the churchiest of church words. Righteous means some cause is appropriate because it's morally right, or a person is righteous because they've behaved ethically. I tend to think of Crush, the sea turtle from Finding Nemo, who surfed the currents along the Great Barrier Reef, declaring the journey *righteous*. That, though, isn't the same thing as the gift of righteousness that God gives us. Luther called it imputed righteousness. Imputed is one of the more confusing but

lesser known churchy words. In more common language, this means even though we haven't behaved righteously - even though we sin - God accepts us as righteous because we're clothed with Christ in our baptism. God gives us salvation, not because we paid for it, but because when Jesus became human and put on our human nature, he simultaneously wrapped us in his righteousness, swaddled us in his holiness just as Mary swaddles him in Bethlehem. He's not just human, but we look at him as human. We're not just righteous, but God looks at us as righteous. So the call to give without demanding payment, is something like a modified Golden rule. Do for others as God has done for you. We love because God first loved us. That's the logic of the Christian life.

So then what are we to give? That's the tempting question, the one that seems to make the most sense at first. God tells us to give without demanding payment, so apparently we're called to

give something of value. In Jesus's words, "this announcement: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons." Give them God's presence. Give them healing. Give them new life. Give them community (because the biggest problem with leprosy in the first century was social isolation). Give them freedom from demons. That's good stuff to give.

But I say it's a tempting question because it's a limiting question. Asking what we're supposed to give puts us in a posture of retaining something. Any concern with hoarding what we still have ignores this call from Christ because we're relying on our resources rather than our Lord. We forget that God's the one who's given everything to us, not just eternal salvation but bread for the day, resources to ease our lives, relationships for joy, work to focus us, nature to inspire us, art to move us. God's given us all

that we have, and all that we are, so when we give, there's nothing for us to withhold.

The question to ask isn't what should we give, but how what we have could meet the needs of the world. On Friday night, as we celebrated the release of Clyde and Kendall's book at the RDCH, one of the bluegrass musicians shared a song that he wrote after his son's death about twenty years ago. Kendall shared her paintings. Clyde shared his poetry. In the face of our world's sadness and injustice, we shared a piece of beauty. Sometimes, we share hope in the face of the world's hopelessness.

More than that, though, Jesus calls us to end the injustices. That's the command to the disciples. Not to just comfort, but to transform. Christian gifts intend to change the world. When we see racism within our criminal justice system, or even in the church as we just yesterday crossed the two year anniversary of the Mother Emmanuel AME murders in Charleston, we not only join the

prophetic voice of lament, but we join with Jesus's revolutionary activity that refuses to abide by a system that gives white Christians more privilege than others. We give our privilege not to earn something for ourselves but to empower others. When we encounter suffering among the LGBTQ+ community because of phobias supported by bad theology, remembering that the Pulse Nightclub Shooting was also a year ago this week, we give our voices in their defense and our friendship in their support. We give the gifts of words and lives that acknowledge their God given value.

What has God given you? And for what purpose? Those are the questions of God's economy, questions that don't rely on payment but instead rely on grace, but again, Jesus gives us hints to the answer: Give God's presence. Give healing. Give new life. Give community. Give freedom That's the message, the magnificent centrality of the Christian life. You have done nothing

to earn God's forgiveness, nor will you ever do anything worthy of salvation. There's no savings account big enough, no inheritance large enough, not even a payment plan with a long enough term to pay God for the grace that we've received, both for eternity and for today. That's the model set forth in Christ's life, and as we bear the name of Christians, that's the model that we pursue. You received without having to pay, so give without demanding payment. May we follow Christ and give in ways that change the world. Amen.