



## *Faithfully Serve God* *Heritage Day*

*Luke 16:1-13*

*“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

*September 18, 2016*

## **Thoughts for the Week**

Scriptures: Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14 • 1 Timothy 1: 12-17 • Luke 15: 1-10

When you open up the Old Testament to the *Book of Genesis* the first thing that strikes you is that God is totally in charge of the process of creation. Everything that God creates turns out to be good and in accord to the eternal plan. It is only when God decides to create Adam and Eve that the plan runs into difficulty. The problem became evident because Adam and Eve were endowed with freedom of choice. It was only then that bad choices seemingly began to twist God's plan in a direction never planned.

And thus it has been so in the twisted history of humankind. The human community has consistently chosen to act contrary to its nature and God's eternal plan. That has been the pattern that we humans have so often decided to follow throughout our millions of years of history.

You might think that God's eternal plan of good order had incurred some basic fault at its inception and was due for annihilation. But of course, that's not true! I suggest that God already had a back-up plan in mind when the first plan began to go awry, not because of any fault of God's of course. The back-up plan was to be labeled FORGIVENESS. It was only right and just, of course, that God should have such a plan in mind. God obviously seemed to know that if God should endow the human person with freedom of choice, there might well be the chance that they would make the wrong choice, a choice contrary to their human nature and, contrary to the very nature of the planet earth they would name home. So, FORGIVENESS was the obvious alternative plan.

It seems obvious, therefore, that God has been willing to be patient and merciful with us throughout all eternity, the divine hope being that we, each of us, would come to our senses and live according the eternal plan planted deep in our human consciousness. You can hardly imagine such a divine plan falling into total disarray at its very inception. In some sense, the back-up plan, not only saves us from eternal doom, but also saves face for God as well.

That is the picture that we find in the Bible; it is called failure and recovery, sin and redemption.

The first story comes to us out of the desert travels of the Israelite people. Despite the fact that God had endowed this people with the instinctual sense of belief in the Divine and worship of the Divine, they decided to create gods of their own, artificial calves and bulls, gods not made in the image of the Eternal One, but rather of silver and gold...those precious metals of the age.

Fortunately, for the Israelite worshipers of artificial gods, Moses, their wise leader saw through this farce and reminded them that God had made a pact with them since the days of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This pact God would not abandon despite their years of disobedience. "So, the Lord relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict upon his people."

Another second chance, backup-story comes to us from the life of Paul. As we all remember from reading his life history, he grew up in the strict observance of the Jewish law and tradition. When the followers of Jesus began to grow in numbers, he was determined to put this religious outbreak to a stop. On his way to Damascus to curtail the Christian uprising, he encountered Christ in a vision that invited him to come to his senses and become a missionary to the gentiles. Paul then admitted that Christ had demonstrated great patience with him and had given him the eternal second-chance.

Finally, in the gospel of Luke we read three lost and found (second chance) stories: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. In each of these we learn that in the eyes of the Creator, the least, the last and the lost in this world are of eternal importance and significance. In the eyes of the Creator they are among the least, the last and the lost of this world. Thus, our God is named PATIENCE and FORBEARANCE.

No matter how far we, the creatures of earth, may have wandered in our lifetime, the God whose name is patience and forbearance continues to wait patiently for us. This God of ours is ultimately named the God of second chances. For those of us who need second chances almost every day, that is really good news.

*Happy Birthday - Laurie(9/18), Kim(9/20) & Ed(9/21)*

## **Serving God in Your Community**

When it comes to service, what does the Lord ask of all of us? Aren't we all part of His Great Commission? And how can we set a good example of service for our own children?

I picked up my Bible and turned to Matthew 25: 35-40.

*'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 'The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

Service to others in Jesus' name doesn't have to mean going away to a third world country. We can all do something that makes a difference in the lives of others locally. It just takes that personal decision that may mean a little sacrifice on our part to get things started. Whether it's a commitment of time, or money, or both, we are called on to make a difference in this world.

Even living through these remarkably bad economic times, the poorest 5% of Americans are richer than 68% of the entire world! That statistic blew me away! It made me think of Luke 12:48:

*"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."*

Anyone can contact a church that can lead us to a group in which local missions have already been started. Perhaps your gift/calling is starting such a group? If you're looking for some ideas to help your church family branch out, these are some good starting points:

1. Volunteer in your local community. Contact a local group, charity or locally sponsored program. Bring your kids or grandkids along if it is a child-friendly environment!
2. Donate unused goods and clothing that are in good condition. Many local stores that resell usable items offer much needed jobs to the less fortunate in our own communities, which is another form of service. This is also a great place to get your own children involved – ask them to help sort through their old clothes and toys to give some away.
3. Visiting the elderly and sick. By giving a little of our time it can make a huge difference in the lives of others! Another great place to bring your kids along!
4. Serving children. Of course we all think of children's ministry! But there are also ways to serve our children in their classrooms, at the local library or even as a coach or mentor. Bring your own kids along to minister to their peers.
5. Mourn with those who mourn. Share the hope that Jesus brings to those who are suffering a recent loss. You can find this connection through most local churches; also many Hospice programs are good resources to assist anyone who wishes to serve those who are dying or the loved ones who have just lost someone.
7. Serve WITH your kids at a local mission/shelter. Whether it's helping with the meals, doing a little weekend cleaning, or helping to stock a pantry, it's important to teach our kids about serving others.

Most importantly, use your God given talents! If you love to cook, sew, pray for others, encourage people, make cards, garden or even use the computer...there are services that you can volunteer to do! It's not a secret that God will meet our needs. But I've noticed that He uses His Church, many times, to meet those needs in His name.