

## **Season of Plenty: Sharing**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – October 13 2024

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** Acts 4:32-37; Philippians 2:1-4; Matthew 6:19-24 NRSVue

**Reflection:** Psalm 65

**Greeting:** The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful. Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. (Romans 12)

**Prayer:** God, our guide and our guardian, we seek you together in peace and gratitude. Help us this day as we join together to sing your praises and glorify your name. Help us to remember the generosity you have shown us as we remember the example that we have been given to share with one another. We are thankful that you bless us by your grace that we may know your steadfast love and faithfulness are with us all the days of our lives. Watch over us, Heavenly Father, that we may know your gentle hand. Guide us by your Holy Spirit that we may know the direction you need us to go. And let us walk in the footsteps of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may follow in truth and light. May we share in the plenty that we find when we put our trust in your word and your way. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 67

*<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, <sup>2</sup> that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. <sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. <sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. <sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. <sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. <sup>7</sup> May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him. (Psalm 67 NRSVue\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 67, and we hear of God's blessing. That the Lord invites us to share in the plenty he has provided. That we are called to praise God for his generosity. How do you give thanks for the opportunity to share? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How can you invite others to share in the plenty that God has provided? What are some ways that you can give thanks with others for the blessings we find in God's grace? How will you reflect the love of Christ in this season of plenty?

**Prayer:** O Lord, we thank you for listening to the voice of your people. No matter what we face we know that we never face it alone because you are with us. We thank you that your peace is ever before us. We come to you sharing with each other in Christ, knowing that you provide for us with your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek you out in our prayers this day, lifting up the causes that we have to rejoice. We turn to you with the difficulties that we face in our daily lives. We lift up all that we have spoken together, bringing all that we have before you. We also turn to you with the silent pleadings of our hearts, both the quiet praises that we lift up and the silent struggles we hold within. Though they go unspoken, we know that they never go unheard. We bring you our joys and our concerns, our happiness and our sorrow, our mourning and our gladness, knowing that you are there for us in all things. Help us to celebrate that you are with us with the plenty we find in your abounding love and care. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 4, verse 32 through 37.

*<sup>32</sup> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup> They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> There was a Levite from Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). <sup>37</sup> He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37 NRSVue\*)*

Our next reading is from Philippians chapter 2, verse 1 through 4.

*<sup>1</sup> If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4 NRSVue\*)*

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 6, verse 7 through 11.

*<sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>22</sup> "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! <sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters, for a*

*slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:19-24 NRSVue\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As we near the end of our Season of Plenty series, today we reach sharing. When talking about sharing, I wanted to talk about the things that enable us to share. That we overcome selfishness so that we can truly share from the plenty that God has provided. I wanted to look at it from that angle because often it is selfishness that keeps us from sharing. And it's something that we hear in our readings today. Because we are given examples of what it means to truly share. We are given the way that we share. We're also given what we must overcome in order to share. I wanted to look at this because there's a sense of self, of individualism that can sometimes get in the way of the way that we are able to share. And we get such a focus on "every man for himself" that it's easy to lose track of how we are called to be a community together.

We get an idea of community from Acts. In the Acts of the Apostles, we see the early church and the way that they shared together. The sense of sharing they have is complete. It is not any half-hearted measures. It's not with any hesitation. The whole group comes together. They work together, they act together, they worship together. And they give up having private ownership of anything because they held everything in common. They do this so that it's available to everyone in the community. I wanted to hold this up as an example because it's such a radical departure from the self-centered ideas that we often get from the world around us. That you should look out for number one. That it's every man for himself. That we must do everything for ourselves and only take care of ourselves. And it's up to everyone else to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. But that isn't the picture we are given from the church in Acts. Instead, they share everything together. The grace of God is with them and God provides from the plenty that they share. Doing this, they can provide for this group. And as people come to them, they sell what they have and they share it with the whole. They pool their resources and distribute it as any has need. And because of that, there are no needy people among them. There are no people in that community who are struggling. Because they look out for each other. They are selfless. Because they give up the selfish desires of the world and they cling to a life in Christ. And I think it's a great example to have. Because even if we are unable to match them, I think they give us an ideal to strive for. Because even if the example that we take away from that is the selflessness of the early church, I think we can use that as a guide. Because the main message is that they overcame selfishness to want to help each other. I think that can teach us an awful lot. Even if it's just how we should reject selfishness ourselves.

We hear that more in Philippians where we hear the call that people should be of the same mind with the same love. Not clinging to selfishness. Not thinking about only their own ambitions. But we hear again of humility. Humility so that we regard each other with love and

compassion. That as we are called to work together in Christ, we are called to help each other in Christ. And we are called to lift each other up. Not to be concerned with our own ego and our own greatness. But to think of how we can lift each other up and support each other. Now I know what some will say to this. That Paul says that it's better for us to look out for each other's interests instead of our own. And someone might say that we would then be neglecting ourselves. But what we miss when we think that way is that we're expecting no one else to act in Christ. The truth is what we are called to do is to support each other because then others support us. When we look out for each other, then we are all looking out for everyone else. Which means we are all connected, and all cared for. Just like we heard about in Acts. That we share in that same love of Christ because it guides us to be a more selfless people supporting each other. And when we think about each other first, we think about ourselves. First, we are to think about what's good for everyone, not just ourselves. But at the same time, when others are thinking the same way, we all end up benefiting. Because we are of one mind sharing in Christ. And it takes a certain kind of selflessness to do this.

And that's what we hear from Jesus in our gospel reading from Matthew. Selfishness causes us to want to hoard up treasure for ourselves, to store things. But Jesus notes that if we think our stuff, our physical belongings are the best thing we can have, then that's where our love and our heart will be. With things and not people. They will be with things and not Christ. And so, we have to think about what it is we do value in this life. Jesus talks about the eye being the lamp of the body. I think about that with how we see the world. That when we see the world with selfish eyes, then our eye is unhealthy and it distorts the world that we see. But if we have the light of Christ in our eyes, and we see the world with a spirit of sharing, when we see the world valuing the people around us instead of things, then the body is full of light. But selfishness causes that darkness to seep in, causes us to be suspicious, to be greedy, to hoard up things, worrying about when there won't be enough for me, me, me. It's the kind of thing that makes us do foolish things, like running to the store to buy a year's worth of toilet paper because we're afraid there might not be enough for me later. And it relates to who we are willing to serve.

Jesus makes a very pointed statement here. "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." I know some of the arguments I've heard against this before. I know this doesn't always sit well with people. I think it helps to understand exactly what Jesus is telling us here. If we serve wealth, we can't serve God, because it means we're putting wealth before people. Instead of loving our neighbor as ourselves, we are loving our wealth. Instead of sharing the plenty we find in Christ, we hoard it for our own selfish desires. It means, instead of listening to what Christ taught us, that we try to store up his teachings and hoard them along with our things, and that we lose sight of what's truly important in our lives. All because we let wealth be what controls us. Wealth becomes what we value most. Wealth becomes what we worship. It becomes a golden calf that we don't want to let go of. But when

we instead turn to God, God reminds us that he will always provide. That when we share together in Christ, there will always be enough for all. Just like the early church, there was not a needy person among them because they provided for each other. As Paul said, the best thing we can do is to care for one another in Christ, that we be of one accord, gathered together in Christ. And just as we talked last week about that invitation being open to everyone, when we accept that invitation, we share together. And to truly share, we have to realize that we cannot serve our things. Not that we can't have things, not that we can't have nice stuff, not that we can't have wealth at all. But if we serve that wealth, it means that it has taken the place of God in our lives. If instead we follow Christ and let God use that wealth so that we may help each other, so that we may love our neighbor as ourselves and dedicate ourselves to the love of God, then it serves God. And it gives us a way that we may be complete, a way that we may help one another to share together, to grow together.

Because when we give up that selfishness, it helps us to find what truly matters in the eyes of Christ. Supporting each other, lifting each other up, forgiving one another, and sharing in the hope that we have in Christ. Too often in this day and age, we are called to be divided and to be selfish. And so, I ask you this week to reflect on the ways that we can let go of those selfish desires, so that we can be together in Christ, sharing in all that we have and in all that we are. That we may share of the plenty God has provided, that all may know God's love and grace. That all may feel welcome, and that all may share together in the love that we find in our risen Savior. That we may share in the love that we find in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Season of Plenty**

This series is a reflection on the work we are called to do as the body of Christ. In it, we explore how we invite others to the table and how we share in what we have. God's love as our shepherd acts as an example that we can follow. We are called to share in the harvest as we care for others and act with the Holy Spirit. In this season of plenty, how will you share the peace of Christ with others?

9/22: Harvesting  
10/13: Sharing

9/29: Shepherding  
10/20: Timing

10/6: Inviting

Pastor Cam will be on vacation October 27<sup>th</sup> so there will not be a printing or mailing that week.

### **Neoga Grace UMC**

752 Walnut  
PO Box 610  
Neoga, IL 62447  
(217)895-2809  
Worship 10:30am

### **Toledo UMC**

Madison & Ohio St  
PO Box 267  
Toledo, IL 62468  
Worship 8:15am

### **Etna UMC**

2799 Etna Rd  
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