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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
28 July 2024

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

Worship Theme:

MEANINGFUL MINISTRY: GOD MEETS OUR NEEDS TO MEET OTHERS' NEEDS

Everything you have was given to you by your good and gracious Father. We need to understand that. But it is just as important that we understand why God provides for our physical needs. God has called us to ministry. He asks us to reflect his love in meeting the physical and spiritual needs of others. By providing for us, God meets our need to meet others' needs. Jesus promises that he will provide the resources necessary to conduct meaningful ministry.

Sermon Theme: "Is God Fair?"

1. Yes
2. No

Grace, and mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

"God is able to bless you abundantly." What was your first gut reaction to hearing those words? Was it "boy don't I know it – look at how much God has given me! I'm so blessed!"? Or was it a much more common thought in our country, something along the lines of "if God is able to bless me abundantly, then why hasn't he? There are so many things I don't have – when will God finally start blessing me like that!?"? Regardless of which side you landed on and what your gut reaction was toward God's ability to abundantly bless, it logically leads us directly to our focus question and thought for today: **Is God Fair?**

We all wrestle with this question at some point in our lives, and for some of us, it seems as if we find ourselves asking this question all day every day. Either way we answer it, someone is quickly dissatisfied. But today our answer to the question **"Is God Fair?"** will be a resounding **YES! Yes, God is fair.**

And the wheels are already turning in your mind, aren't they. The age-old complaints, the "gotcha" responses are primed and ready. Things like, "If God is fair, why are there starving children in Africa?" "If God is fair, why are there still homeless people, even in the United States?" "If God is fair, why do some people have more than they know what to do with while other people are constantly going deeper and deeper into debt just to survive?" "If God is fair, *why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? (Jeremiah 12) Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? Their homes are safe and free from fear. They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. (Job 21)*" For as long as there have been people on earth, we've looked at our lives and compared the things we have with the possessions of others and said, "How can you possibly call this 'fair', God?! It's NOT fair!"

Depending on which studies and articles you read, many people claim that most Americans are within the wealthiest top percentages in the world. But whether we're millionaires or living paycheck-to-paycheck barely making ends meet, the grass is always greener on the other side, isn't it. Someone always has something we don't. No doubt you've heard the quote from John D. Rockefeller, the first-ever billionaire in the world. When he was asked how much money is enough, he responded, "Just a little bit more." And we both agree with that and get upset at it, because yes we would also like "just a little bit more" or maybe even a large bit more, but also we're frustrated and unhappy if it happens to other people and not to us. Because "fair" is subjective, isn't it. "Fair" never means everything is equal; "fair" always puts me on top and gives me the most. And if God hasn't *blessed me abundantly* to that point, then he must not be a fair God.

But **yes, God is absolutely fair.** How can we say that? Because he's God! If God is God, then God is the Creator of all things. And if God is the Creator of all things, then God is also the Owner of all things – everything in existence belongs first and foremost to God. Really it **ONLY** belongs to God! No one has a claim on anything more than God does, because without him there would be nothing at all. So if God is the Owner of everything, then God alone has the right to decide what to do with his things. And you and I do not have the right to go head-to-head with GOD and tell him he's doing it wrong. God is the Lord of the universe, the King of all creation. We are created beings living in that universe – we do not get to tell the Lord and King what he can and can't do with what he made. God is the Owner of everything, therefore God makes the decisions – and **that's fair!**

But then we realize what exactly it is that God has decided to do with what belongs to him: he has chosen to give it to us. **Is that a fair God? NO!** Absolutely not! In fact, I can't think of anything more unfair than God choosing to graciously and generously give to people like me and you. We know who we are and we know what we've done and we know we've gone against God's Word and his will more times in our lives than we can possibly remember or count. Sin is no stranger in our world and in our lives. Yet the LORD *opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing* (Psalm 145). If he chooses to satisfy them in uneven amounts, God has the right to make that decision and we must be content with it.

After all, God does not fit into our limited human reasoning. God does not operate or make decisions in the same way we do. In fact, any divine attributes and characteristics of God can only be described as things humans do not have, things we can never fully understand. For example, we who are confined to one space at a time can never fully understand what it's like to be in every place at the same exact moment. And we who are bound by time can never fully understand what it's like to be simultaneously in every moment of time ever and even completely outside the realm of time. God is bigger than our understanding, and we will never fully comprehend the way God is or the ways he thinks and works. We can never see the complete picture the way God can, therefore God will always make better decisions than we will, because God's primary focus is always on eternity first. Professor August Pieper, a WELS pastor and seminary president in the 1920s and

30s, said it this way: “The laws of finite reason are not applicable to the infinite. We know in one way; God knows in all ways. We know partially; God knows completely. We know very little; God knows all. We know one thing after the other; God knows all things at the same time. Therefore it is a pure figment of the imagination when they say that God’s thinking is governed by the same principles as human thinking.” (Wauwatosa Theology I, p. 164) In other words, if we try to understand why God chooses to bless in the times, ways, and amounts that he does, we will fail every single time. His thoughts and ways are always higher than ours!

And yet God still continues to bless, in times, ways, and amounts infinitely beyond what we deserve. As sinners and rebels, we know we deserve nothing at all from God except eternal punishment and condemnation. But we never get it, because Jesus already took that punishment and condemnation. Now instead, God graciously gives us so much good – everything we have is from him! Look around you throughout the day. Whether you’re at home or church or in your car or wherever, look around and see the countless blessings God has given. If we have anything at all, God has been unimaginably **unfair**. **No, God is not fair at all.**

Why would he be so unfair to us? We’re told in 2 Corinthians 9: “*God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*” Did you catch the reasons? God so richly blesses us, not so that we’ll have a comfortable and cushy life here on earth, but rather so that we can use what we have been giving to be a blessing to those around us, in our churches, our communities, and wherever else God may bring us. We can use what God has graciously given to help show Jesus to other people who do not yet know him. The Apostle Paul wonderfully reminds us that when we use our blessings to bless others, it results in praise and thanksgiving to God.

And our physical blessings aren’t even the best part. Certainly they’re important and certainly we thank God for everything he has given us, but God goes even further. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Christians, he writes, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*” (Eph. 1) Every spiritual blessing. That means because of Jesus, we have the full and free forgiveness of all our sins (including discontentment, selfishness, and envy), membership in God’s family by grace through faith, and a perfect eternal home in the presence of our Savior.

So Is God Fair? Yes, God is absolutely fair because everything belongs to him and therefore God alone has the authority and right to decide how, when, and where to use it. **No,** God is absolutely NOT fair because he so graciously and so generously chooses to abundantly pour out both physical and spiritual blessings on us. *Because of the surpassing grace God has given us,* we cry out with believers of all time, “*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*” (2 Cor. 9) AMEN!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.