

“The Rewards Are the Same”

Matthew 10:41-42

Proper 8-A, June 29, 2014

In 1998 Television News Anchor Tom Brokaw wrote a book that went straight to the top of the bestseller's list entitled: **THE GREATEST GENERATION**. It really is a large collection of stories about that generation of American children who grew up during the dark days of the Great Depression in the 1930s. They knew the meaning of difficulty and hardship, and just as things were starting to look a little bit better for them in their lives, they were then called upon by their nation, while they were in their late teens and early twenties—to help save the world—by fighting the Second World War.

MR. BROKAW HAS TWO MAJOR POINTS HE WANTS TO MAKE ABOUT THIS GREATEST GENERATION. THE FIRST IS THAT THE SECOND WORLD WAR WAS FOUGHT ON TWO FRONTS. Yes, there were those **thousands of American soldiers who were fighting on the front lines** of Europe and in the South Pacific. But there was another large segment of Americans, both men and women, who were involved very personally with the war effort here at home, working behind the scenes; long grueling hours in factories, producing military uniforms, vehicles like jeeps and armored tanks, aircraft and aircraft carriers, and all sorts of guns and ammunition.

MR. BROKAW'S SECOND MAJOR POINT is that the ALLIED VICTORY IN WORLD WAR II COULD NOT HAVE BEEN WON WITHOUT THE MOBILIZATION OF AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF AMERICANS; a generation, he calls, the Greatest Generation.

FRIENDS, WHEN YOU STUDY THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, YOU MIGHT ALSO CONCLUDE THAT THE FIRST GENERATION OF CHRISTIANS, WHO LIVED IN LAST HALF of the first century AD also comprised the GREATEST GENERATION OF JESUS' DISCIPLES TOO. They were living in a nation occupied by the Roman Empire. And many of them experienced the kind of harsh divisions in their families, that Jesus is prophesying in our Gospel lesson this morning **because of their intense loyalty to him (Matthew 10:34-42)**.

Jesus said, *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household!”* (Matthew 10:34-36)

Let's remember that the Jesus who is speaking these ominous words to us in our Gospel lesson this morning is the eternally-begotten Son of God. **As the Second Person of the Holy Trinity he is the same God who spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai in the giving of his Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. He is the God who says, "I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY. YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME!" (EXODUS 20:2-3)**

And in his ministry, Jesus actually explains to us the most practical implication behind this first commandment of God's. **FOR WHATEVER, OR WHOEVER, WE LOVE, WORSHIP AND ADORE MORE IN THIS LIFE THAN THE ONLY TRUE AND TRIUNE GOD**—will end up enslaving us over a period of time; be it a person's profession or job, a person's great enjoyment of leisure and fun, or even that of another person.

Friends, is it possible that children could actually love their parents too much?
Is it possible that parents could actually love their children too much?

JESUS CERTAINLY INDICATES THAT THE POSSIBILITY IS ALWAYS THERE.

In Jesus' day, Jewish mothers and fathers were awfully demanding when it came to the lives of their children, which might not have totally been a bad thing when their children are young, in order to teach them self-discipline, and to set high goals for themselves; but **sometimes this kind of demanding approach to children, over the years, can eventually take on a form of manipulation** that can cripple children emotionally who are now even 35 or even 40 years old!

And how about those parents who in their own minds, claim to love their children so much, that they are never completely willing to allow their children to stand on their own two feet? -- **You know there always comes a time when the MOTHER BIRD, FOR THE SAKE OF HER OFFSPRING, finds it necessary to kick the baby birds out of the nest, but with human beings perhaps, this is not always true!**

BUT IN THE TIME THAT WE HAVE LEFT THIS MORNING, I AM HOPING WE MIGHT SOME TIME TALKING ABOUT THESE MYSTERIOUS REWARDS THAT JESUS MENTIONS AT THE END OF OUR GOSPEL LESSON TODAY (vv. 40-42). Yet sometimes, we Christians, and we Lutheran Christians in particular, are very reticent to speak about ANY KIND OF REWARD THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE ALREADY IN THIS LIFE FOR BEING THE KIND OF CHRISTIAN JESUS IS SPEAKING ABOUT IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON.

And didn't Jesus himself caution us against seeking a reward in his Sermon on the Mount; those words that we always read as our Gospel lesson on Ash Wednesday? You know what our Savior says: *"Beware of practicing your deeds of piety before men just to be seen by them! So when you give alms, do not blow a trumpet and announce what you are doing to everyone; just to receive the praise and admiration of other people! If you do, you will have your reward. But it is far better to give your alms in secret! Don't even let your right hand know what your left hand is doing! Then your Father who sees in secret will reward you!"* (Matthew 6)

The same is true for when we pray or dare to participate in that spiritual discipline of fasting! If all you want is the praise and admiration of other people, then go out there and do everything you want to do in public, while constantly blowing your own horn! You'll receive the praise of other people—that will be your reward!

Far better it is to pray to the LORD God, many times in a private manner in a private place, and to do your best to hide the fact from others that you are fasting, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you!"

Jesus teaches us that we are saved by the grace of God and in no other way and that there is no other way that we could ever procure for ourselves our own salvation apart from the ultimate sacrifice that he came to make for all of us in his death on the cross. But still there are great truths in these words. ***"Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not only me but the one who sent me!"***

In Jesus' day there was one important aspect of Jewish law called the "Shaliach Law." Listen to what is written in the **INTERPRETATION COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW**, by a man named Hare, on page 118: **"Behind these words of Jesus was a powerful concept in Jewish law known as the "shaliach" law, according to which a man's duly authorized messenger is to be received as the very presence of the man himself"**

The ones who are sent out by Jesus with the message, the ones on the front line of the church's ministry are will be sent to people to receive the same reward as those who are sent with the message in the first place. THE REWARDS ARE THE SAME. Such recipients may initially take on a much more "supportive role" initially, before they mature into the kind of Christians who may one day be out there on the front line of the Church's ministry too.

The one, who receives a prophet, because he is a prophet, will receive a prophet's reward. Prophets were those people to whom the Holy Spirit of God came with a Word from God to proclaim to others, a word that was personally confirmed within him. Now those who hear and believe the Word will have the Word and the Spirit of God as their personal possession too! No act of kindness on the part of any person shown to any missionary will go unrewarded. ***"And whoever gives one of these little ones (the ones who are sent out) even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward!"***

What we forget is that there are so many people out there who still have not heard the Word of God; and how blessed both they and we might be, when we dare to share it with them.

Not long ago I came across a delightfully true story about a man named John Bowes who worked for the WHAMO TOY COMPANY. He worked in that division of the company that was responsibility for showing charity to disadvantaged children in this world. In the 1980s he was sent to a Roman Catholic Orphanage in Angola, Africa, where there were hundreds of children being wonderfully cared for. He went as a representative of his company with food and clothing, but he also brought along for each child perhaps what later became known as the most famous toy ever produced by the WHAMO Company: A Frisbee.

I imagine that everyone here probably know what a Frisbee is, but later when this man returned home to the states, he receive a lovely thank you letter from one of the nuns he met there Africa. She wrote to them Mr. Bowes for the wonderful new plastic plates that the children were certainly enjoying eating their meals out of. She even explained that some of the children were using their Frisbees to carry water. Some even took them to a nearby stream and found that Frisbees could be useful for catching fish.

This is when Mr. Bowes wrote back to this dear sister explaining to her that the Frisbee was designed primarily to be both a tool and a toy for outdoor recreation. He had to draw a sketch for her of how one person might toss a Frisbee to another. Let's remember that this was long before the days of the Internet and You-Tube.

ON ONE LEVEL THE STORY IS RATHER AMUSING. ON ANOTHER, IT IS VERY SAD. There are people who would gladly enjoy so many articles of clothing that we gladly cast away, people who would be extremely grateful FOR even one faucet in their homes from which they could readily draw safe drinking water: "A cup of cold water."

Christians want to respond to the needs of others less fortunate around them, not simply because we are nice people, but in showing acts of kindness to others, we can be reminded of how poor all of us were, by nature, before the Holy Son of God entered this world, as Peter tells us, the One who bore all of our sins in his body unto death on a tree, that we might die to sin and live to God.

DIDN'T THE THIRD VERSE OF OUR HYMN OF THE DAY express this so profoundly and so beautifully, words I wish everyone could go and ponder and meditate upon?

"Wondrous honor You have given to our humblest charity; In Your own mysterious sentence, 'You have done it unto me!' Can it be O gracious Master than You deign our alms to sue, Saying by Your poor and needy, 'Give as I have given to you!'"? (LSB 851:3) Amen.