

Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 31: 2 - 6

New Testament: Luke 21: 1- 4

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago I casually included the term “equity” in the sermon where we talked about and processed through what it means and looks like to be the body of Christ. Last week, I mentioned that God doesn’t even necessarily want equality but instead, God wants something called equity. I mentioned that equality and equity are not the same things. So then that begs the question, if equality and equity are not the same thing, then what are they?

Equality, according to dictionary.com, is correspondence in quantity, degree, value, rank, or ability. Equity, according to dictionary.com, is the quality of being fair or impartial. A fair summary would be that equality is correspondence while equity is fairness. And isn’t it interesting that equal does not necessarily correlate with fairness? The question then becomes why is this distinction important and even more specifically to our context, why is this distinction important to God?

In last week’s reading from Deuteronomy we read that God’s law to the people states that you must not distort justice; you must not show partiality. In 2 Chronicles Jehoshaphat warns the judges he appointed to be careful what they do for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, nor partiality. Two times we hear from the wisdom writer of Proverbs that showing partiality is not good. The disciples bear witness and testify to the truth that Jesus, God the Son, does not show partiality. They know this for a fact by observing his behaviors and the ways he treats all people. After Peter receives his rooftop vision in which God declares all creatures clean and safe for consumption, he finally understands and confesses before the church council in Jerusalem that God shows no partiality. The Apostle Paul testifies on five separate occasions that God shows no partiality. And James, the brother of Jesus, mentions the same twice in his letter; there is no partiality. It seems to me quite clear that God wants impartiality, that is to say, *fairness* and not just equality or the numbers to correspond.

Perhaps a visual demonstration to get this really into our heads. Ok. Just to make the math easier let’s say Person A earns \$100 a week. Person B earns \$1000 a week. Person A gives \$10. Person B gives \$10. That is equal. But is it fair? Why not? Because person A actually gave more, proportionally, and was left with less. Person B gave proportionally less and was left with more. That is equal. They each gave \$10.

But it is not fair. This is precisely Jesus' point in the widow's mite; our scripture reading this morning. She didn't give more quantitatively but she did give more qualitatively. She gave more of herself. She gave even when it hurt. In giving of our very selves, we are entrusting ourselves to the God who made us; shaped us and formed us in our mother's womb. We are humbling ourselves.

Did you know that the word "tithe" comes from the Hebrew word for tenth? King Hezekiah, in our Old Testament reading, decreed to the people how they were to give to the temple. It was percentage based! He told them to tithe; give a tenth; that is to say, give %10. If giving the same amount was not fair and equitable, could percentage based giving be the answer instead? Let's return to our example. Person A earns \$100 a week. Person B earns \$1000 a week. Person A gives %10, which is still \$10. Person B gives %10, which is now \$100. This is unequal. But is it fair? According to scripture, yes. Even as person A was still left with less to live on and person B was left with more to live on, the proportion they gave was equal. And the end result of King Hezekiah's decree? The prophets and priests, who live off of the tithes of the people, have plenty to eat and then some! (Read verse 9-10) Now, could person B give a higher percentage and *still* have more to live on than person A? Yes and THAT is where generosity kicks in. The widow was generous and that is why Jesus pointed out her actions and honored her in front of all the rich people.

So how does tithing then, giving a tenth, tie into the good news? How does giving generously tie into Jesus laying down his life, only to take it back up again in his resurrection from the dead? With God, there is no such thing as gradation of sins. There is no such thing as some sins requiring more grace, more mercy, more forgiveness from God. Just because we humans deem some sins as more horrendous than others, does not mean that God does so. Just because we humans see "petty theft" as far less egregious than genocide, that doesn't mean that God does. God extends the same amount of grace for Hitler as he does for Martin Luther King Jr. Each is simply God's beloved child, gone astray. The good news of the tithe? The good news of working in percentages? God loves 100%. God forgives 100%. God redeems 100%. You're not going to come before the throne of God and only receive 75% forgiveness; 75% mercy; 75% eternal life. God is with you %100.

As you contemplate your pledge for 2025, I humbly ask that you think in terms of tithing; of giving a percentage instead of a round number. There is, as yet, great untapped potential here and we do have the capacity for God's kingdom here in the congregation, in the local community of Lexington, and even to the ends of the earth. Thank you for giving to the cause of God's kingdom here on earth. Amen.