

**Minnesota Valley Church; Sunday, February 23, 2025;
7th Sunday after Epiphany**

Prelude: Rebekah Olson

HYMN #474 “Lead Me to Calvary”

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 103:1-5

PASTOR: Bless the LORD, O my soul;

ALL: And all that is within me, bless His holy name!

PASTOR: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

ALL: And forget not all His benefits:

PASTOR: Who forgives all your iniquities,

ALL: Who heals all your diseases,

PASTOR: Who redeems your life from destruction,

ALL: Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,

PASTOR: Who satisfies your mouth with good things,

ALL: So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

HYMN #308(vss 1&4) “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE: Bedtime “Favorite Thing”

Reader: Joel Carrizales

Old Testament Lesson: *Genesis 45:3-15 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great*

deliverance. 8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. 10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me--you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.' 12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. 13 Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly." 14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Epistle Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: Apostles' Creed- *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen*

Gloria Patri: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Announcements and Receive Offering

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: Songs to be chosen by Hannah

SERMON: "A LIFE WORTH LIVING" Luke 6:27-38 Pastor Tom Olson; *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen*

DIFFERENCE: There is a difference between an easy life and a good life. Some people have easy lives but are very unhappy. Some people have hard lives but they make them into good lives. Life goes by quickly and as we look back on our lives, it is wonderful to reflect on the times we made good choices. A good life is just whole bunch of good choices piled up. A doctor recently said, "We should not focus on dying but instead focus on dying with as few regrets as possible." To do that you focus on living!

KEYS: Jesus gives us here some very powerful ideas of how to make hard times with difficult people into a good life. He gives a keys to a LIFE WORTH LIVING. Luke 6:27-38...

I. THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Luke 6:27-33 *"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.*

ABUSERS: Part of the cost of living is being treated poorly by others. There are many people in this world that are not very nice and we will be forced to associate with them at times. Some of them may even be family members. Others are co-workers. Jesus tells us here what people may do to us in this life:

- Some will hate us
- Some will curse us
- Some will hit us
- Some will take our possessions

WEAPON: I don't believe that Jesus is saying that we should easily let people abuse us. In fact, the Bible (Proverbs and Psalm 1) warns us to avoid evil people as much as possible. But when it is unavoidable, Jesus tells us what to do. He urges us to pay them back with the WEAPON OF KINDNESS. I tell the young couple who are about to be married, if they ever get to the point in their marriage that they want to kill their spouse that they have my permission, but the weapon they must use is kindness, **KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS.**

RADICAL: If they hate you, love them back, if they curse you, speak blessings to them, if they hit you, don't strike back, they take your possessions, let them go. Don't fight them.

RETALIATION: I don't believe that Jesus is telling us to not defend ourselves or protect our property. He is talking to Jews, abused by Romans, they have no civil rights and can't do anything about the abuse. To put it another way that would make sense to us, I believe what He is saying is **DON'T RETALIATE**. To retaliate makes a bad situation worse. Romans 12 expands on this theme and puts it this way, ***"Don't take revenge. Vengeance is God's prerogative."***

CREDIT: He goes on to say that loving those who love you is easy. But loving those who abuse you is hard. He adds the word **CREDIT** here. It is to our credit if we do. The implication is that God sees all things and when we respond to those who are mean to us with kindness that **HEAVEN TAKES NOTICE AND WRITES IT DOWN**.

MELT: Doing kind things to such people is also a way to melt their hardened hearts. Romans 12:20 calls it ***"heaping burning coals upon their heads."*** I have watched some of our church members be kind to folks who have been unkind to them, and it is a beautiful thing. You can literally feel the presence and power of God when they are nice to people that they have every right to detest.

PAUL: The Apostle Paul takes this teaching of Jesus and expresses it in a beautiful way in ***Ephesians 4:31-5:2 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

LOVE: I appreciate the way he put it: ***"LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE."*** There was an old Jesus People song from hippie days that was a

paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13 that had this phrase in it: ***"If I have not Charity, If love does not flow through me, I am nothing, JESUS REDUCE ME TO LOVE."***

A LIFE WORTH LIVING makes use of **THE POWER OF KINDNESS**. Secondly...

II. THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

Luke 6:34-36 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

GIVERS: **LIFE IS WORTH LIVING** if we learn **THE JOY OF GENEROSITY**. Jesus is telling us here not to be **LENDERS** but to be **GIVERS**. Lending is allowing someone to have something with the expectation you will get it back with interest or some other additional gift.

TAKER: I once knew a man who would like to do favors for you for free. But there always was the expectation that you **OWED HIM** and he could demand a favor back, usually a bigger one than he gave you, at any time. People owed him but nobody liked him. He was an unhappy man consumed with himself. I felt sorry for his wife and children. They had to treat him like a king, or else! I suspect they were relieved when he died.

WAR: One way to make a great impact upon your soul and touch the hearts of hardened people is to "lend" your time, talents and treasures to your "enemies."

UKRAINE: I have been thinking about this war in Ukraine. It may be a foolish thought, but what if the President of Ukraine, who is

rightfully angry at Russia for invading their country...what if he contacted Vladimir Putin and said, "I want to talk with you, just you and I, perhaps in neutral Switzerland. I want to hear your concerns from your own mouth. I want to discover ways we can address those concerns. I truly want you to have a safe and prosperous country and I believe that you would want that for us as well. Rather than killing each other, let's try to build a friendship, trust and mutual understanding." I don't know if that would be possible, but I wish he would simply try to begin the conversation. About three million people have been killed by not talking. The war is at a stalemate. I think it is worth a try. It is an expression of undeserved generosity to give him that time and a listening ear without the United States or anyone else represented in that room...just the two of them.

HAPPY: Generous people are happy people. Volunteers are generous. When I go to the Como Zoo or to a hospital, or to vote on election day and observe the volunteers, they are some of the happiest people I know. They usually have a big smile on their faces. Generosity results in a river of joy that flows from our innermost being.

GIFTS: There are many things we can give away that will be seeds of joy in the garden of our hearts...money, time, compliments, a listening ear, patience, slowness to anger, a helping hand and so much more. The greatest gift we can give people is the good news of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven.

CROSS: Jesus freely gave all he had when he went to the cross for us and died for the sins of the whole world. The chorus puts it well, "He gave His life, what more could He give? Oh how He loves you and me."

FLOWS: When we freely give to those who don't deserve it, the love of God flows through us and the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with joy. Finally, A LIFE WORTH LIVING has...

III. THE ABUNDANT ATTITUDE

Luke 6:37-38 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

FEAR: A LIFE WORTH LIVING is a life with **THE ABUNDANT ATTITUDE**. Miserable people have an attitude of scarcity, that we are going to run out of money, food, resources, time, safety and the list goes on. When they look to the future they see dark clouds. Fear surrounds them and affects their decisions. I have known many people who live under the cloud of fear and scarcity.

PREPPING: It is amazing the extreme lengths people will go to because they fear the future. I have seen people build underground bunkers, pile up mountains of dried foods, fill their homes with gold and silver in case our currency fails and the list goes on. I am not at all criticizing appropriate savings for our old age, but I am talking about living in fear rather than in faith. In hard times a loaf of bread is worth more than a bag of gold or a room full of guns and ammunition. I know a man in another state that had shelves of ammunition. I can tell you that this man seldom smiled and I never saw him help other people.

The Bible is filled with stories that remind us that God takes care of His children. He fed Elijah with food brought in by a bird. He gave the children of Israel manna from heaven and water from a rock.

JUDGEMENTAL: A judgmental attitude about other people is a real soul killer. "Jesus also tells us here not to judge, lest we be judged." This is talking about a extremely critical attitude that boomerangs back on us.

CONFESSION: I talked to a man a couple days ago who had a marvelous conversion to Christ. God is using him mightily, even after a wild and sinful life in his youth. He confessed to me that one of his biggest problems is to be examining and judging other people. It takes away his joy. He is asking God to help him to stop focusing on the shortcomings of others.

IMAGINARY: I remember lying in bed and giving imaginary speeches to people in church about how they should be more dedicated and serious about the things of the Lord. I felt the Spirit of God rebuke my soul and whisper to me this thought, "If you would just be more spiritual yourself, those people would desire what you have and follow you as you follow me." That was a real turn around in my mind and it was a great relief. It is not my job so much to CRITICIZE the shortcomings in others as it is to provide an example of having an abundant attitude that looks for the best in others and provides a good example for them. I need to leave the rest to God.

LAPS: No matter what is on the horizon, everything will be BETTER if we have an ABUNDANT ATTITUDE. Jesus has promised us that if we do, all that we need will be "poured into our laps."

FULFILLED: God has already fulfilled that promise to us who believe. He has made us His children, he has blotted out our sins, He is preparing a place for us in heaven, He has made us joint heirs with Christ, He has appointed us as ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven to the place where He has put us on earth.

BUNYAN: One thing that keeps prisoners of war alive is their attitude, the hope of returning home. In John Bunyan's famous book, "Pilgrim's Progress," the thing that kept Christian going along a difficult path was the knowledge that he was heading toward the Celestial City. When he kept the goal in mind, he had an attitude that could carry him through any test or trial. It made his difficult LIFE WORTH LIVING.

Hebrews 12:1-3 says it well, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

CONCLUSION: When all is said and done, we want to have A LIFE WORTH LIVING. This life flows from:

- THE POWER OF KINDNESS
- THE JOY OF GENEROSITY
- THE ABUNDANT ATTITUDE

APPEAL: If you would like to pray about any of these things, the altar is open and any number of us would be glad to pray with you. It is my desire that when we grow old, we will come to the conclusion that we have had A LIFE WORTH LIVING.

May the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

Hymn #502 "I'm Pressing on the Upward Way"

Lord's Prayer

Benediction & Doxology *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A-men. A-men. A---men.*

Postlude: Rebekah Olson