

**Proper 17 Year B**

**8/29/2021**

**Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Psalm 45:1-2, 7-10; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

**Rev. Mark A. Lafler**

Our second reading today comes from the first chapter of the book of James...

An epistle... a letter...

It is often called the proverbs of the New Testament because it contains easily quoted verses that are very pragmatic in nature.

And our reading today certainly lives up to that reputation.

Such as:

*Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger...*

We all need to be frequently reminded of this.

Also...

*...be doers of the word, and not merely hearers...*

The book of James is full of these types of one liner(s)...

Helpful little quotes to remind us of truth in this life.

Today, I want to focus on the first verse of our reading...

It's James 1:17...

And it reads:

*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

And there are a couple of things that stand out to me in this verse.

And the main thing is this word **generous**.

Being generous should be a characteristic we have as Christians...

The word means:

*showing a readiness to give more of something, such as money or time, than is strictly necessary or expected.*

It is to give more than what is expected...

To go the extra mile...

We often associate generosity with financial giving...

But generosity should describe all parts of our lives...

Time...

Giving Encouragement.

Talents.

Mother Teresa...

the famous Roman Catholic nun and missionary in India wrote:

*Someone asked a Hindu man: What is a Christian?*

*He responded: The Christian is someone who gives.<sup>1</sup>*

It's a good description...

And a reminder to all of us...

We should be known by our generosity as individual Christians as well as a church.

Generosity is the language of the love of God.

Mother Teresa goes on to tell a story of her time in India.

She writes:

*One night, a man came to our house to tell me that a Hindu family, a family of eight children, had not eaten anything for days.*

*They had nothing to eat.*

*I took enough rice for a meal and went to their house.*

*I could see the hungry faces, the children with their bulging eyes. The sight could not have been more dramatic!*

*The mother took the rice from my hands, divided it in half and went out.*

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<sup>1</sup> Mother Teresa, *In My Own Words* (New York: Random House, 1996), 17.

*When she came back a little later, I asked her:*

*Where did you go?*

*What did you do?*

*She answered: They also are hungry.*

*“They” were the people next door, a Muslim family with the same number of children to feed and who did not have any food either.*

*That mother was aware of the situation.*

*She had the courage and the love to share her meager portion of rice with others.*

*In spite of her circumstances, I think she felt very happy to share with her neighbors the little I had taken her.*

*In order not to take away her happiness, I did not take her anymore rice that night. I took her some more the following day.<sup>2</sup>*

That is an example to us all...

Generous giving should be how our neighbors would describe us.

Not just financially...

but also with our time...

with our giftings...

With every part of who we are.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 16.

And the reason for this is because we are followers of Christ Jesus.

Our Heavenly Father is a giving father...

He is the God of giving...

Generosity is the language of the love of God.

*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...*

Father of lights is a way of describing the God of creation.

The God who made the stars, the sun, and the moon...

In fact, as soon as we open to the first page of the Bible, we are introduced to God... who we find out is creating...

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...*

In other words... giving...

giving His good creation to those who he created in his image...

humanity...

God is a giving God...

Of course, we see this once again in the most famous verse in all of Scripture...

John 3:16 –

*For God so loved the world that he GAVE is only begotten Son...*

The whole reason we can even dream about the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life, and the blessings of God... is because God is a giving God.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Because Jesus gave his life on the cross...

For us...

He gave his life and took on our sins...

When we believe in that sacrifice...

We receive the Spirit of life...

We receive eternal life...

by the assurance of the Holy Spirit within us.

And it all comes back to the act of giving...

Generous giving is the language of the love of God.

Now this description of God as the Father of lights...

Is unique here in all of scripture...

And as was mentioned it refers to the God of creation.

God gives us the great gifts of the sun, the moon, and the stars...

Giving us by them the ability to see...

The ability to navigate the seas...

The ability to keep time...

But as dependable as these lights in the sky are...

Their shining comes and goes...

We still come to a time of night...

We still have moonless nights...

And starless skies...

The clouds come in...

The storms move in...

And we can lose focus...

We can wonder what happened to the great gifts...

Worry, fear, anxiety can set in.

With so many things going on in our world...

From the Delta Variant to a hurricane making land today...

From the violence in Afghanistan to the earthquake in Haiti...

From all the places where evil is reigning in our world... the ones that don't have the media's attention...

To our own struggles in life...

In our families...

In our neighborhoods.

We can ask...

Where is God?

Where is this God who gives such great gifts?

And yet in faith...

In hope... we hear the words of St. James:

[In God] *there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

We serve a God who does not change.

No variation...

Not even a hint of change.

The same giving God that we serve today is the same giving God that we will serve tomorrow.

We can rest in his generosity.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more than he does right now.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us less than he does right now.

God's love is for us...

So even in the midst of the clouds and storms of life.

God is a good God...

He always will be...

So, as we face the trials and struggles in our life and in this world...

Today...

Tomorrow...

This week...

May we take a new measure of confidence from the encouraging words of St. James.

*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above,  
coming down from the Father of lights,  
with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

Church...

We serve a good God...

A God who is present.

A God who is faithful.

A God who does not change.

A God who gives.

Giving his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

That...

Is the most consistent thing we can count on in life.

Praise be to God.

Be encouraged today.

God is a giving God... and the target of his giving is you.

Amen.