



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Our Gospel text for tonight is from Matthew's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This sermon constitutes a large part of his teachings. In Chapter 6 essentially all his teaching is a treatise on faith. Jesus encourages us not to solicit human praise for righteous deeds, but rather to trust God to reward us. Concerning almsgiving, prayer and fasting, Jesus tells us not to do these things as a public show but rather to do them in secret. It is God that will reward those who give, pray and fast, not humans.

Listen again to the language here: Whenever you give alms, whenever you pray, whenever you fast. Jesus already assumes that we do these three things. He is not telling us to start doing them, but rather assumes that we will keep these spiritual disciplines. He takes for granted the faithfulness of his listeners and followers.

So, the question here is not if, but when. Jesus assumes not only that we do these three things but that they come naturally. And we do them without having to be told. Giving for example comes naturally to most folks. Whether it is donating a bag of groceries to the food pantry, giving money to a disaster relief organization, or giving to someone in need on a Facebook go fund me page, we all give. Compassion for others comes naturally. It is a quality deep in our souls. True, some folks are more compassionate than others. That

could be due to the environment they grew up in. And it does seem true that the strong are drawn to helping those who are weak.

In 2017 our women's book club here at CTS read a book by Khaled Hosseini called [A Thousand Splendid Suns](#). It is a novel set during the Soviet invasion and Taliban reign in Afghanistan. In it there is a scene where two women are at odds with each other. The older, Mariam, is the wife of Rasheed, a shoemaker. The younger is Laila, who is a 14-year-old orphan who has no other choice than to marry Rasheed who then will take care of her. These two women are now forced to share a husband and a home.

Mariam will have nothing to do with Laila. And Laila innocently wants to be liked. Soon Laila gives birth to a beautiful little girl whom she names, Aziza. And so, Mariam's jealousy is heightened. Soon Mariam, who submits to Rasheed's demands and wrath begins opening her heart to Laila.

In fact, one morning Laila opens her bedroom door and finds a neatly stacked pile of baby clothes for her daughter. Mariam lovingly hand stitched all of them. Soon the wall between these two women begins to crumble and a bond is built.

No, we don't have to give alms to the poor, but we do it because we care about each other. And isn't it true that there are times in life that we could use a helping hand and there is usually one there to help us.

As for praying. No one forces us to pray. We do it because of a deep seeded longing for a relationship with our creator. And we find that when we pray, it becomes a very fulfilling. It even becomes life giving, live changing, and a confidence builder.

I have long thought about what Rodney told me years ago when he was active in the military. He said that there are no atheists in foxholes. I wondered if that was possible or not. But truthfully, what better time to pray to God for comfort, strength, and safety?

Fasting is another of our discussions by Jesus. As Lutherans we don't talk much about fasting, do we? In fact, we live in a world of self-indulgence and so we probably talk less about it today than decades ago. Yet I do see evidence of fasting even today. Roman Catholics still do not eat meat on Friday, especially during Lent. And if you listen to your body, sometimes it is

good to cut back on food and drink. I remember my mother always saying to feed a cold and starve a fever. Did your mom tell you that too?

People have long asked me what I have given up for Lent and usually I answer that I do not give up stuff but rather try to add a new devotional practice or more Scripture reading during Lent. But many people do stop eating chocolate or even drinking alcohol for Lent. Possibly fasting, for them will bring them closer to an awareness of God's grace.

But whatever you do in all three of these disciplines; giving, praying, and fasting, we need to do them without a lot of worldly fanfare. For it is known by God what is in our hearts and what has made us give, pray, and fast. Being focused on why we are doing these things is way more important than letting the world know we have done them. So, to sum up our lesson for tonight. . . When you give alms, don't make a big deal about it. Give anonymously. Don't expect something in return. Don't try to impress others. When you pray, don't make a big show about it. Pray privately. Talk to God the same way you would a friend. Be honest, be open and be straightforward. When you fast, don't make a big show of it. You don't need to tell everyone within earshot that you gave up sweets for Lent.

**AMEN**

Simply put, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything to the glory of God. And God will be pleased and honor your gifts of devotion and service. You will be blessed beyond anything you might otherwise imagine. Thanks be to God.