



Redeemer Lutheran Church *of Leisure World*

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Reflections on WORSHIP and DISCIPLESHIP by Margo Geesing

God's Ways are NOT Our Ways

All the Gospel lessons for the month of September have at least one continuous theme: we and God do NOT think the same way! We all know this in our heads but the Gospels bring this point home in realistic ways. God asks more, God listens more, God forgives more, and God is more generous than we ever are. That's one of the ways God is different from humans. God is a God of abundance!

The first Sunday's Gospel immediately follows the last Sunday in August's Gospel, literally, it starts at the next verse. In August, Peter proclaims Jesus is the Messiah. In September, Peter wants Jesus to turn away from the path he is on. Jesus recognizes that Peter is voicing his dismay over what the Father is calling Jesus to do, Peter is thinking in human ways. Jesus, after a pretty strong rebuke of Peter, goes on to explain that God's way is not always easy or simple but it is for a greater reward. Jesus talks about denying one's self, taking up and carrying a cross, of losing one's life as a pathway that his followers are called to. But I understand Peter. We are humans. We think like humans. We really don't like pain or hardship or troubles. We would rather a life of ease with happy family and friends around, where people like us, where we have enough and are willing to share our extras. We would like to be comfortable. Alas, God really, really doesn't do that. We don't hear of believers that got an easy life where they were well liked, had no troubles, and got to do what they wanted. Makes you wonder sometimes, why?!? Why do we CHOOSE this life? Oh, yeah, that reward later!

Second Sunday in September Jesus is giving relationship advice! It makes sense. If you are having a problem with someone, go talk to them! Don't go complaining to twenty other people first. Don't call them out in public. Go, speak to them in private. Show them respect, and they will probably be more respectful to you. If that doesn't work, then you try again with a couple of neutral people. This way you both have witnesses and, the third parties may be able to help negotiate a workable response. Only after this, do you bring it before the community. And even this, is done with respect for both parties involved. And the community determines the appropriate response. The parties accept the community's

decision or not. And the community deals with it. After this, it is done. Jesus doesn't say you need to bring it up every time you meet or continue to complain about it with others! The ending of this Gospel for the second Sunday in September has to do with prayer. Prayer is powerful. God answers prayers. Jesus is always with us when we gather in prayer. This is one of the reasons that attending and participating in Sunday Worship is so important. There are a few issues that Jesus does not address about prayer. Sometimes God says no [remember, God's way is not always our way]. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers the way we want. Sometimes we need to continue to ask, persistence does count. Sometimes God works through others to answer prayers. Sometimes you are the answer to another's prayer.

Third Sunday in September [Pastor Gil's Ordination Anniversary and birthday ☺]
Jesus talks about forgiveness and mercy. 539. That's the number of times we need to forgive someone. Jesus does not go into detail about how to count that number. He does not say: per person per offense per times you think about it but really, that's what it is. So, someone offends you. You are supposed to forgive them for that offense, 539 times right now! You think about it later, you are supposed to forgive them another 539 times. Think about it a second time, another 539 times. Same person offends you a different way or a different time, the count begins again. See where this is going. Because we follow Jesus, we are called to forgive like Jesus. Actually, Jesus does not keep count. You sin [offend him] and he forgives you. He does not think about it later. For him, it is done. Jesus gives a number because we are supposed to "forgive your brother or sister from your heart". This is our sticking point. We do not let it go. We think about it. We hold grudges. We take it out and polish it and put it on a shelf so we can see it. That's on us. Please note, Jesus does not say: after they apologize or after they make up for it or after they ask for it or only if they forgive you for something first. He just says forgive. And this is why following Jesus: walking in Jesus's footsteps, being the hands, feet and heart of Jesus to others is soooooo hard. If it was easy, everyone would do it! By the way, it is also healthier for you!

The fourth Sunday in September we have the parable of the generous landowner. I am always of two minds with this Gospel. Part of me thinks, well, that just teaches the earlier workers not to try to get hired early with this landowner, just wait until the end and still get paid the same! But then again, what if next time, the landowner only goes out the one time in the early part of the day. Then you are out a whole day's wages just waiting around. And he did pay them what was agreed upon. God's generosity is nothing like ours. God does not quantify his generosity. He is a God of abundance: abundant love, abundant grace, abundant faith, abundant forgiveness, abundant patience, abundant mercy, and abundant justice. God gave his gift of his Son, Jesus, to all the world throughout all time for all people. There is not a limit on how much God can give. There is not a limit on how big heaven can be. This parable is for all of us. It is a reminder that we who have been blessed with faith at an earlier time in our life, are still going to get our reward. But we do not have the power to limit who gets the reward. We don't get to decide who gets to heaven and who doesn't. Not our job! Our job is not to stand in the way of others coming to faith. Our job is to work in God's Kingdom the best we can so others can join in the work. It's like the people who come to

faith later in life. The reward promised you at baptism through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ is not diminished by the sharing with others. In fact, it is strengthened and made more perfect because there are more people who share the journey with us. And a final thought, who says which set of workers we are? We always assume that we are the first group; but what if we are the last? Makes you think a little different about it, huh?