

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA
The Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost: October 10, 2021
“Reciprocity”
Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to stewardship season. *“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

Our Old Testament reading has Job trying to bargain with God and Psalm 22 is often thought of as the Psalm Jesus was reciting from the cross before he died, “God why have you forsaken me.” But in each case, there is an underestimated thought that God should be at our human level.

In response to Job, God asks the questions of whether Job was there during the creation of the world and all its creatures, and if Jesus did recite Psalm 22 on the cross, we know the answer to whether God had forsaken him is explained at the resurrection. This tells us that God is not on our playing level. The very air we breathe – except for the pollution humans themselves have added- is a gift from God. Each day we receive mercy as we go about our lives trampling God’s creation and each other. We are called by today’s scripture to understand reciprocity. That God gives us grace so that we may become grace to someone else in need.

There is a lovely book entitled “Braiding Sweet Grass” which explains God’s work in the world from the Native American viewpoint; a very different view from what is usually gleaned from our Biblical stories about the way the world was created and how humans were originally gifted and also responsible for God’s creation in a way of servitude, rather than dominion over.

Author Robin Wall Kimmerer explains that reciprocity is the natural order of how God works. As a professor of botany, she breaks down various plants, lichens and amphibians that naturally, through their own lifecycle, interweave with their surroundings, each other, other species and human beings. The destruction of one thing leads to the release and possibility of something else. The form may change but the spirit, the energy, lives on.

The Native American view of God's creation is both as giver and receiver - something others seem to have lost. Robin writes, "In the Western tradition there is a recognized hierarchy of beings, with, of course, the human being on top—the pinnacle of evolution, the darling of Creation—and the plants at the bottom. But in Native ways of knowing, human people are often referred to as 'the younger brothers of Creation.' We say that humans have the least experience with how to live and thus the most to learn—we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance. Their wisdom is apparent in the way that they live. They teach us by example. They've been on the earth far longer than we have been and have had time to figure things out."

If our purpose on earth is to nourish the earth and care for each other while we are here on this planet or to prepare us for a homecoming of whatever comes after this life, then whether we do it through living to the best of our ability the Ten Commandments or embracing a spirituality that has respectful reciprocity as a focus, your soul will grow.

"He who dies with the most toys wins" may be a funny bumper sticker, but this is not the purpose of the soul. This is what Jesus is explaining to us. Those who have everything now, having more than they will ever need (often considered the

privileged and the first) will not have grown in the ways of those who have been dealt less or those who have shared their gifts with others. The first shall be last. For those in our Bible study class, we admit that even King Solomon who had everything was at times not very happy at all.

Job was not there at the creation of the world; mortals are a temporary state; only God is eternal and unchangeable. As Robin Wall Kimmerer explains, the earth and all the things in it are constantly renewing themselves, changing. And all beings have relationships that need tending to, in order to survive and thrive, and that is what leads to stewardship.

Jesus is telling us that God loves us, period. He doesn't care what car you drive or how many possessions you have, but He is interested in whether or not you can share the good news. The good news that God loves everyone, no matter their geopolitical-economic status.

You as followers of Jesus. You are the ones who understand that relationship with God and others is more important than wealth. You have been given the job of sharing that good news. Remember the good news: feed the poor, clothe the naked and set the prisoner free. This is the true mission of the church, and it has never changed. We know and have received grace and we help in the time of need.

The original New Testament church was built on a foundation that everyone put their goods and possessions into the common pot and everyone's needs could be met. Not too much, not too little. Unfortunately, it seems the very nature of people is geared toward thinking of scarcity and therefore one is constantly worried on a soul level of not having enough, not being enough, not loving or being loved

enough, not enough, not enough. That is truly prison. But the good news is: God thinks you are enough. You have received that gift from God free to share with others in whatever way they need it: whether as a friend, a ride, groceries, or a donation.

We here at CTL are followers of Jesus. Yes, we are followers of Jesus in a capitalistic and very stressful monetary society. But we retain the wisdom that together we can make a difference, because with God all things are possible.

I may put one dollar into the First Sunday donation envelope, but with all the other dollars, it begins to be enough to make a difference. You know this, CTL has funded many who were struggling through this time of pandemic and God has reciprocated and keeps at least our digital doors open.

I am so proud of our church through this pandemic. Remember, it is through your pledges that we fund this organization that has changed and flexed to keep everyone connected, to grieve our losses together through phone and digital means, through mailing copies of sermons to those without internet access.

Through your support we created an amazing front patio and gifted financial aid to keep La Casita open. There is no way I can list all the amazing things your contributions to CTL have done, but I know that, just like creation, it is reciprocal. Because when **you** find yourself in need, **we** are here for you, **we are here for each other**, through time, talent and monetarily. And that is truly priceless. Amen