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“The Joy of Receiving”

Text: Mark 6:7-13; Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3

I don't know about you, but whenever I travel, I always take something along. If it's a long drive, I take at least a bottle of water and something to snack on. If I'm going to be staying overnight, it's a bag with a change of clothes, sleeping clothes, and a toothbrush. And no matter how long or short the trip is, always either cash or a credit card. *Don't leave home without it* American Express used to always remind us.

So for the Lord's disciples . . . this must have been quite an unnerving moment for them. Take *nothing*, Jesus says. No food, no drink, no bag, no money, don't even wear extra clothes. Just go. Don't be concerned with those things; be concerned only with the Gospel. Go and give. Give what I have given you to give: the Gospel. Give the Gospel *in word* - calling people to repentance and giving them forgiveness. And give the Gospel *in deed* - giving freedom to those oppressed by demons and healing to the sick. And they did, Mark reports.

Now, going out to do these things was probably difficult enough. Ever try to knock on doors or talk to others about Jesus? Then you know how hard it can be, and what those twelve must have been going through. But to go with nothing? Are you serious Jesus?

But we find out later that they had everything they needed. Right before He is arrested, Jesus asks them: “*When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?*” They said, “*Nothing*” (Luke 22:35). And so not only was the faith of those who received the Gospel strengthened, so was the faith of the twelve. That God would provide.

But I think more was going on here as well. For as important as it was for the disciples to receive, just as important was it for those who received the Gospel *to give*. For God to provide *through them*. To give the twelve the food, the drink, the clothing, the shelter they needed. To respond to the generosity of the Lord with a generosity of their own. And so be as blessed in their giving as the disciples were in their receiving.

And so Jesus sends the disciples out with nothing, *forcing* them to receive. For if they had taken all the supplies they needed, it would have been easy to turn down the generosity of those they served, and so rob them of the opportunity to give. *No, that's okay, we have everything we need right here*. Not receiving can be just as much a spiritual disease as the greed of not giving, and a trap easy to fall into. To not only be self-sufficient but to want to be self-sufficient. To not want to need or depend on anyone else. To be pridefully strong and independent. Which is a pride that can even dangerously extend into our relationship with God, where even in things spiritual we want to rely on ourselves and

what we can get and do, rather than having to rely on Him and what He gives and has done.

That can manifest itself in a number of ways. Maybe we are hesitant to ask for prayers. Maybe we are reluctant to receive the gifts of others. Maybe we can't even remember the last time we asked for help. And maybe some are so used to going it on their own that they don't even come to church anymore. If so, maybe the Lord will see fit to take some things away from us and humble us or cause some other need to force us to receive too. That others may give.

For the essence of faith is receiving and giving. Receiving from God and giving to others. The believers in Antioch that we heard of in the reading from Acts are an example of that. Having received the Gospel from the believers that came to them from Jerusalem, when they heard of the famine that was to happen, they couldn't wait to give, sending relief back in the hands of Barnabas and Saul. And then later they sent Barnabas and Saul out again, this time as missionaries. That just as others had been a blessing to them, so now they were a blessing to others. Receiving and giving. A fellowship, a sharing, of riches both spiritual and physical.

For we were not created to be independent or self-sufficient. That is not the way of God but of Satan. As God is a Trinity, so we created in His image were created to be in community with others. And especially in relationship with God. And when sin broke that fellowship, God the Father gave. He gave His only-begotten Son, that we be restored as sons and daughters of God and receive from Him the forgiveness and life we need. And so instead of independent and self-sufficient, a Christian is marked by humble repentance and receiving - receiving the Word and gifts of God. Both from God and from those God has given us.

And then giving. Barnabas is known for his generous giving in support of the Church. But he gave not only from his wealth, but also of his time, his effort, his strength, and ultimately his life. And many were blessed through him. But as Barnabas would tell you, you cannot out-give God. As generous as he was, Barnabas had received far more, and is enjoying even now the gift of everlasting life.

And so it is with you. No matter how young or old you are, no matter how rich or poor, in your Baptism you have received adoption as sons and daughters of God, the gifts of faith and forgiveness and His Spirit and His kingdom. There is nothing greater you could ever receive. So rejoice in what you have been given, and rejoice in giving. And when you are given to, humbly receive and give thanks, knowing that the one giving is being blessed as much as you. It is the way of our Lord.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.