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Lent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“All God Wants To Do Is Give Us Everything”
Text: Luke 15:1-3a, 11-32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

All God wants to do is give us everything. Turn that over in your mind a few times. *All God wants to do is give us everything.*

Why don't we believe that?

Well, I think there are a couple reasons. First, and quite simply, because we don't have everything. There are things I want that I don't have. And so if God wanted to give me everything, He would have. I'd have the money I want, the stuff I want, the home I want, the spouse I want, the job I want. But I don't, so . . .

But maybe there's a reason why the God who wants to give us everything hasn't yet. Perhaps He knows that were He to give us our whole inheritance now, that we'd waste it with prodigal living. So while He wants to give us everything, He hasn't yet because He is preparing us for what He wants to give. After all, you do not give a beginning music student the most expensive instrument and a Beethoven symphony to start out! If you take up running, you don't start with a marathon. And if you're learning to drive, you don't start with a Porsche. That's just setting you up to fail; you're not ready yet. So God doesn't just give, He prepares us to receive, that we receive what He gives not selfishly, or with a sense of entitlement, but with thanksgiving to the Giver. That's reason number one.

But there's another reason why we don't believe that *all God wants to do is give us everything*: because Satan doesn't want us to believe it. And so he has deceived us into thinking that God isn't like that at all. That He doesn't give, He takes, He demands, He spoils.

But really? Think about it. What does God need from you? What does God need *period*? What could you possibly give the Creator of the universe that He doesn't either already have or couldn't get for Himself? Or to make yourself worthy to be His child? That's right, nothing. Not one little thing. Yet Satan has painted such a picture of God for us and in our minds that we see Him not as He is, but . . . how? Unfair? Taking? Demanding? Mean? Someone who doesn't need but demands anyway? *Is that really who God is?*

Or is God not more like the father in the parable Jesus told today. This parable that you know as the Parable of the Prodigal Son - the son who gets most of the attention - but which would probably be better named **the Parable of the Prodigal Father**. The Father who prodigiously gives and gives and gives some more.

Now you know *some* of what the father gives in this parable. First, He gives his younger son his share of the inheritance. It was shameful for the son to ask for it like that, to wish his father dead *now* so that he could get his fortune and have his fun and make his own way in the world. And even though the father knew it would not be best, he gives it. It is his character to give - even his hired servants are well cared for and have more than enough. And then when the son returns with his tail between his legs, after having lost everything - money *and* reputation - the father gives him even more - a new robe, new sandals, a new ring, and a great feast. The father, it seems, can't stop giving. It's remarkable and almost unbelievable.

But there's even more. There is something else here that the father gives, that is easy to overlook, that perhaps you hadn't thought of, but is perhaps more important than everything else: **he gives his honor**. He allows himself to be shamed in order to honor his sons.

And it perhaps starts at the very beginning, when the younger son asks for his share of the inheritance. As I said, it was shameful for him to do so, but the father - instead of taking a hard line, refusing, and so garnering honor and approval for himself among the townsfolk - *allows himself to be dishonored*. He gives the inheritance and in so doing, he himself becomes the topic of conversation and shame. Perhaps the son could be excused for his immaturity, but the father? What he did? Caving like that? How weak and gullible and stupid.

And then it gets worse when the younger son returns after his tabloid-headline adventures. The father doesn't make his son grovel and shame himself, he bestows honor on his son! He hikes up his robes and runs out to his filthy son. He embraces his son who is as dirty as a pig sty and smells even worse, and kisses him. He covers his filth with a new robe and sandals and ring, and throws an expensive feast for him. And with this he - and not his son - becomes the topic of conversation again. In that culture, he would have been looked down on for not making his son beg to even see him; to even be allowed into his presence! He would have been ridiculed for embracing and kissing this filthy, poor excuse for a son. And he would have been mocked for giving his son not only a new robe, but the *best* robe - probably his own robe. And then also the family's signet ring, which today would be kind of like giving him the password to your online banking accounts. **The father gives up his honor to restore honor to his son.**

And he does it for the older son as well - his resentful, hated-filled, older son. When he disobeys and himself disrespects his father by refusing to come into the party, the father goes after him too. And he doesn't demand, he doesn't flex his fatherly muscles - he goes on to beg his older son to forgive and come in and celebrate. And so he himself, again, becomes the object of gossip and disgrace. No self-respecting father would do that! No sensible man would do that. Make them do it. Make them change. Make them earn it.

That's how the world thinks. That how satan wants you to think. But how is it with God, in truth?

We just sang it. *God loved the world so that He gave, His only Son the lost to save* (LSB #571).

And St. Paul also told us today how it is with God: ***For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

And that, in a nutshell, is the Parable of the Prodigal Father. The father, who knew no sin, took his sons' sins - he took their shame, he took their rebellion - upon himself, to make them right again. To give to them. **For all he wants to do is give them everything.**

And with that, we see what God has done for us in the Son He gave us, in Jesus. He who knew no sin took our sin. He who knew no shame took our shame. He who had no filth took our filth. He who perfectly obeyed in everything took our rebellion and disobedience upon Himself. He who deserved only praise took our condemnation and death. That ***in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*** That in Him, we be forgiven and honored, cleansed and exalted. That God give us everything.

For all God wants to do is give us everything.

But what do we do? How do we respond? Well, often we run away. Like the **younger** son, running away from Him to the life we think we want - the fun, the excitement, the independence. Or like the **older** son, resenting the ones who return; resenting to whom God gives His gifts - thinking them not worthy or undeserving, and so then keeping yourself away from Him and dissatisfied with what He wants to give you.

Or maybe you, like **both** sons, fall into the trap of chasing after and focusing only on the things of this world and life, and killing yourself to get the here and now instead of what lasts forever; chasing after what will make us momentarily happy instead of lasting joy. Rejoicing little in His name given to us in Holy Baptism and focusing much on the name we make for ourselves.

Or maybe you're like the **older** son in resisting repentance and confession, and instead want to excuse your behaviour and think that *you're* the good one, *you're* not as bad as

the other guy, *you're* not a tax collector or a really bad and notorious sinner, and so thinking you deserve your Father's favor. And so rejecting His holiness in favor of your own. Rejecting the honor He wants to give in favor of the honor you can get for yourself.

And what else do you do? How else are we like these two sons?

This Lenten season, the call goes out: repent. Turn around. Give it up and give up. And realize once again how foolish we've been. How foolish to think we can get more, do better, and be happier apart from our gracious, giving Father. Our Father, *who just wants to give you everything.*

And who now has the Body and Blood of His dear Son here for you. To forgive your sin, to strengthen your faith, to feed your soul. Not because you are one of His hired hands, but because you are His dear child. And as Paul would later write to the Romans (8:32): *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* Indeed, He will. All things. In due time. Not as you demand, but in love, as you're ready. For your good. It's all He really wants to do.

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