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### **Living Offering**

Luke 7:36-39

There are many times in life when the world, the way things seem to be, just doesn't make sense. There are moments when we are reminded that we are not in control and our world is not the way we would hope. Maybe these times come because of the incomprehensible acts that humanity is capable of that we see on the news, in the paper or read in our history; or because of that unpredictable event, loss of a loved one, job, etc. that shakes up our lives, or even because of the seeming loss of goodness and what is right in a world whose number one goal seems to be "busyness." There are times in life that we are reminded that we are not in control and we are in desperate need of God.

I remember one of these times. I had been living in Dallas, TX in an inner-city community and was working as the youth director for a United Methodist Community Center. After having worked there for about one year, I began to feel like a father. In fact, that was my job, I was hoping, in faith, to raise up these mostly junior high boys. Many of my coworkers would tease me about being their "DAD." Reaching out in love and seeking to be involved in another person's life can always be a risky and dangerous task, and it was for me as I began to care deeply for them and their future. It was bound to happen, and one day it finally did. I entered a point of despair. These youths, their lives were radically different from my sheltered middle class existence. Growing up, I received pretty much anything I wanted or needed; while the parents of these youth had to scrape by to get just the basics for their kids. While I was trapped in the culture of sports and being an "active" youth, these young boys were trapped in the culture of gangs and learning about life through the streets. They literally found themselves in life and death situations. One youth was shot outside his house after school. Another young man's mother was shot in a drive-by as some rival boys randomly fired bullets in his house. This definitely was not life as I knew it. Why should anyone have to grow up in such circumstances? Sadly, as I lived in this community I became all too familiar with the sound of guns. This realization did not occur until one day, after easily dismissing the sound of a gunshot, I discovered that this particular shot killed a junior high kid at a phone booth a half a block from my home. Whoa, what kind of world is this?

Again the lives of these youth were radically different from my own, and one night I took my frustration, my anger to God. "God it is not fair! This world is not fair! These are good boys, but through the seemingly randomness of birth I was born into an easy life while many of these youth could not even conceive of the future because they

were not even sure they would have a future. Why, God, is our world like this? Where are you? That night in prayer, I said several words that many would say are unfit when talking to God, but I was at a loss. "God", I cried, "it does not make sense. Why?" Many of the Christian platitudes that I accepted growing up did not seem to make sense. I even began to dislike the Christian church, because it did not have much of a presence here. It is always easier to live in our own little world ignoring the reality of the greater world around. So here I was, one desperate, lonely night, crying out to God, "Why is life so unfair!" In Dallas, I was acutely aware that I was not in control

Truth is we as a people are uncomfortable with these times. We do our best to keep our lives ordered and in control with mystery and chaos at bay. But in doing that, we also keep God and Life at bay for a false sense of life as we think we know it. If the God we worship falters in the darkest, deepest places of reality, can that be God at all? So here I was struggling with despair and bewildered by our world. However, thankfully, our God, the God seen in Christ, is even more bewildering than the world. Thankfully, even though we can be surprised by the ways of this world, the ways of God are often even more baffling and surprising.

Let's be honest. It is hard to grasp God, because God is **so holy, so other, so good** that we struggle to relate. The riches, depth, and knowledge of God are beyond our comprehension and this very truth is grace because God is even greater than any definition of goodness that we could ever conceive. Thanks be to God that God is more! However, this makes God hard to grasp and even often a mystery. God's love is unconditional which is baffling to us, because we live in a world where every love-- **every love--** has conditions. God's way is mercy and this is hard to see as a viable way because in our world we are expected to earn our own keep, receive what we are due, and pull ourselves up by the bootstraps. God's salvation and God's kingdom is beyond imagination because our imaginations are more confined by a world where people are divided between "those that have" and "those that have not." Thus, God's peaceable kingdom seems more like a sentimental dream or unrealistic notion than the actual way in which we live within this world even though this kingdom is at the very heart of God and salvation.

But again, it is grace that God is more than we can comprehend. At least, the author of Romans seems to think so. In the beginning of our passage today, the writer is acknowledging the incomprehensible nature of God. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" After beginning to taste this extreme goodness of God the only response seems to be praise, to give thanks that God is so good, and even more than we can imagine. "To him be the glory forever, AMEN." So what do we do with this? In a world that needs God's goodness, a goodness that we are not wise enough to comprehend, what happens next?

There I was that night stuck between two realities: the goodness of God and the unfairness of life. All I could do, the only thing that I really could do was to declare my ignorance. I wanted God and the world to make sense, but it was beyond me. I remember praying, "God I want to start over. The Christian faith that I have believed in

up until this point seems shallow and incomplete with too many pithy sayings for every situation. However, here, in this place where life seems unfair, it just doesn't make sense. There's got to be more." I don't want to give the wrong idea. That night was not some heroic act of offering my life to God. In fact it was just the opposite; it was a desperate act of wanting everything to make sense. Maybe you are wiser than I, but I was not wise enough to understand it all. So what else can we do? If God's goodness is beyond us; while at the same time our world is in need of God's goodness, we really only have one option. We are called to offer our lives to the goodness of God that is beyond our comprehension. Or as Romans states, "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In other words, not just partially offer, but offer ourselves fully as a living sacrifice, a living offering.

The central act we as Christians have to give is offering the totality of our lives to God. Humanity is not wise enough or smart enough to get past the sins of pride, selfish ambition and the influence of power. God is the goodness our world needs and we can participate in that coming goodness by offering our lives to God. Offering is not that thing we do in worship where we give a few gifts, some money, and dedicate our talents for the building of a better world that we call God's kingdom. **NO!!! Offering itself is the entrance into God's kingdom reality, new way of life.** Offering is the door into God's hope where God re-makes, re-shapes, and recreates us more into the people of God who know, live and reveal God's future by our present way of being. Through offering, God makes this world new. But be warned, through offering, God also makes our lives new.

I love how this works out in Romans. Again, we begin with the extreme Goodness and riches of God that we cannot understand and thank God that God is beyond our understanding. Therefore, the next act is to offer yourself as a living sacrifice into the life, Goodness and communion with God, And here is what I love, by doing this, the God we once could not understand through the act of offering we discover a renewing of the mind that begins to learn to discern and understand the will of God. In other words, the God who is at first indiscernible through offering our lives, we learn to discern God's will and ways not because we are smart enough, but because we have entered into communion and life with God. Plus, even though God begins as a mystery before us, through the act of offering ourselves, the very mysterious goodness of God becomes our way of life. The mysterious, baffling, goodness of God that is hard to conceive becomes more known because it is seen in our lives as we do strange things such as feed our enemies, live in harmony with others, etc. In the passage a whole new world, way of being and even conceiving the world is opened up by the act of offering ourselves fully, completely and totally to God. Offering ourselves to God is the act that makes ourselves and the world new. Through offering ourselves to God we become marked with the peculiar but wonderful ways of Christ as they become the ways of our life.

God is the God of the cross and Resurrection. In other words, God takes our seeming act of giving our lives away to God as the door into new life, Resurrection and

hope for our world. Let us offer ourselves completely. Let us offer ourselves more fully to the baffling God who hopefully will continue to baffle us and our world with kingdom come.

We will end this morning with John Wesley's covenant prayer. It's a prayer that speaks to the depth of offering ourselves to God. However, before we pray it, I want to warn you, there are many parts of this prayer that still make me nervous. This is no prayer of partial offering, but complete offering. Let us prayer together, but later read it again, think about it. I would love to talk with you, tell you where the prayer makes me nervous as you share the same with me. Again, let us offer our lives to God in prayer.