

## Life's Too Short to be Selfish

### Luke 6:37-38

<sup>37</sup>“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup>give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” **The gospel of the Lord.** Thanks be to God.

We begin our season of Lent, here on Ash Wednesday. Tonight we will be marked with a cross of ashes—a mark on our forehead, that reminds us of our mortality: from dust to dust. That reminds us indeed, life IS short—too short, to NOT live it as fully as God intends for us.

But if you are like me, this week, the reminder of our mortality is right in front of us—as a community, as family and friends, we grieve the death of one of our young people. I know that there are so many here tonight, whose hearts are very heavy. *It is all too pronounced and true*, that life is short—too short—on so many fronts. We don't need ashes to remind us that.

But the smudge on our foreheads, will be placed there to remind us of something else, too—*because it's NOT just a smudge*, it is the MARK of a CROSS. As scripture teaches us, it is a symbol of ownership—a sign that we belong to God.

It is, in fact, a *shadow* of that same cross that was marked on our foreheads in baptism—to remain there upon us forever, for all of our lives and beyond—a sign—a promise, that WE belong to God. Yes, Life can be too short, but the cross of Christ—Christ, who saves us—that cross marks us forever. Yes, dust to dust, it's true. But we are *God's* dust—and it is God who breathes *life* into us dusty folks—it is God, who holds us our whole lives through—and into forever. It is God who holds us: when we are all too mindful of how short life is, as well as when we're rather oblivious to it. God holds us—the cross claims us.

So, during this season of Lent this year, let us intentionally *think* together *about this life we have been given*; and *what we might do with it*. **If life is too short, how will we try to live it?** If life is short, what difference will God make, in our day to day living?

Tonight, we begin by taking note, that life is too short to be selfish. We will touch on other truths as well: Life is too short to play it safe, to hold a grudge, to be envious, to worry, to work all the time. Man, those all sound pretty human to me! I've probably done each one of those in the past 24 hours.

But isn't it true, that God in Christ **DOES offer us a better way?** This whole *faith journey* is one of discovery. Through joys and sorrows, through life and death, we learn to look for God, because God is there, showing us the better way.

Is it trite to say, "life is too short to be selfish"?? *Probably*. But isn't it also true? Can't we acknowledge that we make our lives *smaller*, when we neglect—as *Mary and her M&Ms taught us*—to share: our stuff, ourselves, our gifts, even our burdens and pains and cares and joys with one another. With God. Life is too short to live small—to be selfish.

Just ask any monkey. Did I lose you? Let me explain.

I've read that farmers in South East Asia, many years ago, relied on an interesting technique to catch a pesky monkey: they would take a big, young coconut, make a small hole in it, and put a few pieces of fruit or nuts inside.

Before long, the ever-curious monkey would: discover the coconut, see the hole, get their hand in there, and *grab hold* of the fruit. The problem was, when they would try to pull their hand out—they couldn't.

But, no matter what, they would not let go of the fruit inside...instead, they would remain stuck, and start screaming...or whatever you call it when a monkey makes a whole lot of noise.

All the monkey would have to do, to escape, is to LET GO OF THE FRUIT. Open their hand, and they are free. Most of us would know better, than to get physically "stuck" in such a way. But I wonder how often the metaphor applies: in our lives, in our pursuits, in our relationships; in our successes, in our failures and our brokenness? Sometimes we behave more like a monkey than we want to admit. We close our hands around our stuff, our accomplishments, and our disappointments, too. *And, we can hold on pretty tight.*

We can hold on pretty tight, to our ambitions or our accomplishments. We can hold on pretty tight, to the notion that we have sole power to create our future—that we are fully in control of our lives. We can hold on pretty tight, without ever acknowledging God as the source of our living. Or our need for others, too.

We can hold on pretty tight, to our failures, to every disappointment. We can clench our fists, certain *everything* is our fault, that we deserve to suffer. We can hold on to bitterness, to anger, to our resentments toward another—or the whole world, who's wronged us. We can refuse to let go—refuse to open our hands.

**But tight-fisted folks** just can't live life as God intends for us; as God dreams for us. Isn't it true that we can become so absorbed in the ways we define ourselves, that we forget about that cross on our forehead? We forget that we belong to God; we forget that we don't have to live, with clenched fists. **Jesus promises us new life, when we open our hands.**

When we feel at the end of our rope; when we feel alone in the world; when we feel lost, or too sure of ourselves, God in Christ welcomes us to open our hands. And receive the gifts of God. **Grace, love, hope.** And these are not small things.

The apostle Paul reminds us, in his letter to the Romans, Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus—nothing, NOT death, nor life...nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. "Nothing can separate us from love of God" ....Paul proclaims with resound: **nothing.**

Because of this promise, we tight-fisted folks, **can** open our hands, even just a little, for God to pour grace and life into them.

What makes for white knuckles, in your life? There is nothing God will not bear with you. There is no sin too great, there is no hurt too deep, there is no pride too inflated, that God will not pour God's self into you. I speak this promise, by the way, with a fairly tight grip, myself.

But I hope this Lenten season might be a *journey* for us, together, toward loosening our grip: opening our hands—to be generous; opening our hands—to be humble; opening our hands—to receive the gifts of others; opening our hands—to be forgiven, with grace beyond measure.

Life's too short, to be selfish. May we open our hands—to let God in Christ fill us. **Amen.**