

What is God Up To? A sermon by The Rev. Keenan Kelsey
Noe Valley Ministry, a progressive Presbyterian Church 11/18/07

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:6-12

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.’

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

WHAT IS GOD UP TO?

This is the question that Rev. Jack Haberer proposed at our Presbytery meeting yesterday. Jack is the editor of a prestigious publication, *Presbyterian Outlook* –I think it is prestigious because they once wrote a whole article around a sermon I had given, with long quotes and attributions! Of course, I knew they had goggled it on the internet, and obviously gleaned it out of the published sermons without looking at the rest of our website, because they referred to the author as” he.” Nonetheless, it was fun for me, and quite an honor!

What is God up to? This question seemed far more interesting to me than what I was going to talk about this morning. So I am going to pose that question to you today, based on Rev. Haberer’s sermon.

What *is* God up to?

Certainly it could not be as simple as populating heaven? Could our time on earth simply be the Hogwarts sorting-hat for filling God’s prime real-estate? Or could God’s ultimate goal be to establish good morals and behavior here on earth? Maybe, but the disciples weren’t exactly school marms with the right answers – were they meant to be a modern Mod Squad righting wrongs and setting people straight?

Jack said he once took a survey with this question and the answers fell into 5 categories. --Some said God was about proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ, the evangelical camp. Some said God’s prime purpose was more mystical, a communion of the spirit, an experience of God that invited intimacy, the Spiritual camp. --The ecclesiastical camp felt that God’s main purpose was the building up of the church, the establishment and growth of Christ’s body here on earth.--A fourth camp he named the altruistic: God’s

prime purpose was to meet the needs of the people. --This is was aligned with, but still distinct from, the fifth group, the camp of justice: those who said God was about seeking shalom, equity and world peace

These are all good answers, he concedes, but all partial answers.

Jack suggests that what God is really about is found in that foundational phrase, that covenant, first declared to Moses in Exodus. Moses is arguing with the voice from that burning bush, whimpering "Who are you to ask me to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God answers, "I am who I am. These are my people, and I am their God."

I think this is a profound insight! According to Jack, God yearns to make every part of life relational. There is an intimacy and an intensity in a God so determined to love us and care for us. This is a God of passion and pathos, a God who longs to love and be loved. So God's ultimate intention would be, to connect – to establish a relationship, and not only with each of us individually, but with us collectively. You will be my people. We are seen as a community with God at our helm. God says, we are better off together than alone, so God calls us to live in a covenantal accountability with our brothers and sisters, even those we don't like!

This foundational covenant echoes throughout the Bible. In Jeremiah, God says, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel and they will be my people. I have loved you with an everlasting love; I will build you up again and turn your mourning into gladness."

Ezekiel uses the same phrase, as God is raising the dry bones: After he commands, I have put my spirit in you and you will live, God explains to Ezekiel, "They will be my people and I will be their God."

Paul refers to this phrase in the first letter to the Corinthians, and again in his letter to the Hebrews, where he references back to Jeremiah: "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts, I will be their God and they will be my people."

In 1st Peter, Paul refers to the young Christians as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a hold nation, a people belonging to God. Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God, once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

And finally even in Revelations, there is an exploding excitement about the New Jerusalem where, once again, "they will be God's people and God's very self will be with them and be their God." Write this down, God says, "for these words are trustworthy and true."

This foundational covenant under girds every psalm written – We heard Psalm 16 -- a song of praise and trust and thanksgiving based on the absolute knowledge of God's good abundance and faithful love. But the psalm also reminds us that to live in praise and trust and thanksgiving, is a choice: "The HOLY ONE is my chosen portion and my cup; God -- a generous God --holds my lot.

God's purpose includes dependency, our dependency. Adam and Eve may have claimed their autonomy in the Garden of Eden, but God's purpose is to correct that cosmic inversion and declare "I am God, You are my people." In the best sense of the word, we belong to God. God will guide us and care for us; we will trust God to do this, responding with awe and thanksgiving.

I think the finish line of "What God Is Up To" is voiced by Paul in the passage we heard today. "You have been made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every occasion." The implied effect of the promise "I will be your God and you will be my people" is the promise that the world will be blessed, through us. We are sent out, like the disciples to preach and teach, to heal and to care. We are blessed, to be a blessing.

Paul reminds us that we are commissioned into mission under the Law of Bounty: God is a bounteous and giving God "able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work."

We are commissioned under the Law of the Harvest: "the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." If we sow seeds of kindness and love and generosity, we will reap kindness and love and generosity. We will be enriched in every way!

And we are commissioned under the Law of Interdependence. To God be the glory. We are dependant on God and God will always sustain and support us.

This is season to celebrate our abundance, to focus on the positives in our life, so that the more thankful we feel, the more joyful we feel. And joy is contagious. It overflows. And when it overflows, -- well, we are God's people, so naturally, we want to respond.

We want to do thanks. To give thanks. Give things. Give thoughts. Give love. The gratitude becomes the gift, creating a cycle of giving and receiving, an endless waterfall. Filling up and spilling over, responding from the fullness of our being.

Extravagant gratitude: when lived out in acts of thanksgiving, makes God's extravagant love real, alive, bursting forth in abundance.

May it be so. Amen