

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
Following Jesus 101: Sharing Lavishly – Part 1
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Deuteronomy 26:6-9; Ephesians 3:14-21

“Hey John, are you going to share?” It was a question I had become used to at the ripe old age of ten. It was asked of me on a regular basis in the lunch room at my elementary school. My friends and I would sit at the same table, unpack our lunches and they would quickly glance to see what came out of my lunch-box...yes, I had a lunch box...got a new one every year...then if they saw them...if they saw my mother’s homemade chocolate chip cookies, they would all ask, “Hey John, are you going to share?” I knew what my answer should be. After all, I went to church and Sunday school every Sunday. I learned about sharing with my brothers. I knew what a good Christian would do and so my answer was always, “No I am not going to share.” I say this because I knew what they meant when they used the word share. They meant give my mother’s cookies away. And I knew the instant I gave in and gave one cookie to one friend, then I would have to give a cookie to every friend, and then, eventually, there would be none left for me. Sharing meant giving away...and I was not up to giving away the most precious thing in my lunch.

I must admit until I began working on this sermon about sharing lavishly that I had never thought much about the multitude of ways we use the word share or sharing. Sharing can mean giving things away, like my cookies. Sharing can mean two children taking turns playing with the same toy. Sharing can mean two people spending time together. Sharing can mean loaning a tool or car with the expectation of it being returned. Sharing can mean multiple people using the same car-share service. All those ways of using the word share made me wonder then, what does that really mean when we talk about God sharing lavishly? Which of these ways of using the word explains how God shares? I suppose the most obvious way is one we have talked about before, and that is that God gives us stuff. That God shares with us creation and community. If this sounds familiar, it should be because I talked about it in my opening sermon on how we know God loves the world, that God shares with us, gives us, this amazing planet and amazing communities of care. We can see this if we were to continue reading the Deuteronomy passage that Peter read this morning about the land flowing with milk and honey. If we had continued, we would have read that the people were to regularly give God thanks, for what God has given them. In other words, God gave God’s people stuff...land and all that it contains to help the people prosper. In some ways this use of the word sharing is perhaps most familiar to us, when we give God thanks for our meals, our families, friends, nation and all the other stuff we have been given. God shares by giving. Yet, what I want to offer you this morning, is that there is, another critical and often missed way God shares...and that is that God shares God’s presence and power with us. meaning God shares God’s very self with us.

Let me explain. When God shares creation and community with us, God does not simply give us stuff and say, enjoy it, and then check back in with me when you have an issue. God goes before us, behind us, and inside of us. God literally shares God’s presence and power with us. This understanding of how God shares lavishly is at the heart of the Biblical story. To see a great example of this all we need

to do is get in our Way-Way Back Biblical Time Machine and return to the time just before the people of God entered the Land of Promise. What we would have seen was a people, seemingly wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Yet, they were not wandering aimlessly. God's presence was with them. The scriptures tell us that God regularly checked in with Moses in the Tent of Meeting; that Moses would go into the tent and have conversations with God which would help Moses lead the people. God also led the people with fire by night and a cloud by day...not sure how that worked, but God was there. God gave the people the Law. God was present. At the same time, God's power was there as God protected the people from more powerful enemies, poisonous serpents, hunger, thirst, and even poorly made clothing...ask me later. God shared lavishly with the people by sharing God's presence and power.

This lavish sharing is also at the heart of the New Testament and it is at the heart of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. The portion of that letter we read this morning is Paul's prayer that the people will continue to experience God's lavish sharing by experiencing God's presence and God's power. Listen again for Paul's prayer for God's presence. He prays that "*...Christ may dwell (meaning to pitch his tent) in your hearts through faith...*" and that God's people would be "*...filled with the fullness of God...*" meaning that the cup would overflow with God's presence. I want us to think about this for a moment. As I said, the image is that God pitches God's tent within us. This is one of Paul's ongoing images taken from the Hebrew scriptures, that just as God met with Moses in the tent, or the people in the Temple, God now meets with us, because we are the new tent of meeting. We are the new Temple. The reason Paul prays for this presence is so that the Ephesians might experience God's power. "*I pray that according to the riches of God's glory, that God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with **power** through God's Spirit.*" And, "*I pray that you may have the **power** to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth...of the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge.*" Paul prays that the Ephesians will experience God's presence and power in order that they know their value and worth as beloved children of God.

The gift we have been given as children of God is that God continues to share with us not only creation and community, but also God's own presence and power. God lavishly shares these things with us not only to sustain us, but to constantly remind us of our infinite value as those made in God's own image; to remind us that we are enfolded in a love that cannot be measured. And this morning we are given a gift of experiencing God's lavish sharing at this table. Before us is bread and cup...creation given to us. Around us is community...the people of God. At the table we have Christ present as our host. In the eating and drinking we find God's power to know the love we have been given. I hope this morning then that you will allow yourself to be, as Paul puts it, empowered to know the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love for you in Jesus Christ.