

Isaiah 65:17-25
Isaiah 12

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
Luke 21:5-19

I have been a member of different frequent flyer programs, starting in the 80's when I was serving on some national boards and committees of the Presbyterian Church. I was flying at least eight trips a year, probably averaging more like ten a year, and was surprised how quickly those miles added up. Those reward programs have given our family a number of free flights--to Disney World in Florida, Disney Land in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, and even two business class seats to Hawaii. Right now, I am with United's Mileage Plus program, and if I sign up for their credit card, I can easily earn 55,000 miles within a few months, which would give me more than enough miles to be awarded two tickets for our next domestic trip to who-knows-where. There must be money in credit cards for they give all kinds of rewards, whether it be in cash, flights, free nights in a hotel, free car rentals.

We all like rewards, don't we? As a young child, a teacher might put a gold star on our school work and we excitedly tell Mom and Dad. We enjoy the rewards given because of good grades or athletic abilities in high school. We love it when our children are rewarded with scholarships to college. Many of you here may have one of Hy-Vee's Fuel Saver and Perks rewards. Right now I have 47 cents off a gallon. Russ's IGA has their Russ's Market Fuel Rewards.

God issues us rewards. I am not talking about what is often referred to as the prosperity. It is not get right with God and life will be fantastic. Get right with God and God will make you prosperous. Of course these preachers are rich because they tell you to send your money to God, but they give you their address! You know what you get when you play a country western cd backwards? You get your dog back, your

girlfriend back, your job back. God does not give things back to you when you obey God. God's rewards aren't tangible rewards. God does provide us with our material needs. But God does not award us with material things.

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Isaiah tells us about another reward. Here, the prophet Isaiah declares that joy is our reward: "I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight." The people of Israel had something to be joyful about. Their exile in Babylon has come to an end. They are to return from their exile and enjoy their homeland once more. However, it was not a perfect time. The people were divided and somewhat cynical about their prospects. There were hardships in the land all around them; their lives were difficult. Their resentment of other nations was strong because of their experience of exile.

Likewise, today, our current situation is not a perfect time. The election of this last week has loudly declared that as a people we are divided. Whether or not the candidate you voted for won or lost, we as a nation are very cynical about our prospects. There continues to be hardship in our land. Most of the wealth is going to the infamous one percent. Many feel disenfranchised. The pundits explain that Trump won because many feel it is not a perfect time and want change in Washington. Many resent other peoples, resenting the undocumented immigrants from Mexico or the refugees from Syria, afraid of these people.

However, God's promise of doing a new thing not only keeps hope alive, but makes joy possible. We find joy from the very beginning of the gospel story. Consider the account in Matthew of the visit of the wise men: "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." Or the account in Luke, when the angel

announced to the frightened shepherds that the Christ child was born, the angel declared, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Jesus tells the disciples "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." The author of the First John declares, "We are writing these things so that your joy may be complete." And just a few chapters before the end of Revelation, before the end of the Bible, an angel declares, "Let us rejoice..."

What I want us to think about this morning is the joy of generosity. We as Americans are told that our joy is in getting. If you want to experience joy, buy a new car, buy the latest technology, wear their perfume, buy their clothes. A consumerist society defines us not by who we are, a child of God, but what we have. Soon it will be the holiday shopping experience, the hell of Black Friday. One woman, Jan Klabacka, confessed that she and her husband hit the stores at 4:30 the morning one Black Friday, and saved \$275 on a laptop computer. However, the experience "was absolutely creepy," she said. "I think someone ... will stand up next year and start a movement to stop this disgusting display of greed by the retailers." David Gooding said, "'I don't recall any hordes of people outside food banks and shelters, anxious to bring in food, blankets or cook a hot breakfast for hundreds of unfortunates. A compassionate society helps those who cannot help themselves. If I saw a frenzy to help others, that would give me joy!" "If I saw a frenzy to help others, that would give me joy."

It is generosity that gives us joy. I am sure you have all had the experience of buying a gift for someone and watching them open the gift. Perhaps as giving your child or your niece or nephew, watching them get all excited while they are opening their gift.

Their excitement is matched by your joy in giving the present. Or the joy of depositing money in the red kettles for the Salvation Army during the Christmas shopping season. Or the joy of bringing caps, mittens, and gloves to be given to children who need them. I would hope that each of you have experienced that kind of joy. It is not the accumulation of material things, the accumulation of wealth that makes us happy. It is generosity. When I am able to help someone in need, or give to mission, that brings me great joy. I hope that you too can experience the joy of generosity. Jesus declared, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I hope you can experience joy in your generosity to the church, to experience the joy of knowing that your giving to the church makes our mission possible. Your giving makes it possible for the people of God to worship in this sanctuary, to have an organist, a choir director, a choir to aid us in our praise to God. It is your giving that makes the Christian nurture of our children possible. It is your gifts that make it possible for the youth of our church to experience God's love. It is your giving that makes it possible for our shut-ins to still feel connected with the church and that the church cares for them. It is your giving that maintains our physical plant so that we can be in ministry. It is your gifts that make it possible for us to serve and to help others. And it is your generosity that will bring you joy.

One mother shares the story of receiving an email from her first-grader's teacher. He was giving away a \$5.00 bill to another student at recess. The recess aide was confused and felt this was wrong, so she alerted his teacher, who confiscated the money until the end of the day and asked that I handle this at home. The mother went on to say, "My son doesn't really understand money yet. But we do not live in a society

in which people can comprehend generosity, either.” It is my hope that as the people of God, you can comprehend generosity, and that by giving you can experience the joy of generosity! Your reward for generosity is joy!

Blessed be the Lord our God. Amen.