



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

**SERMON – 25TH PENTECOST/ANNUAL GIVING APPEAL
DEUTERONOMY 8:10-18, JOHN 3:16-17
NOVEMBER 14, 2021**

“GOD SO LOVED ... HE GAVE”

Before there was an HGTV and hits like “Fixer Upper”, “Love It or List It” or “Property Brothers”, there was ABC’s “Extreme Home Makeover” featuring the irrepressible and effervescent Ty Pennington. In my former residence of Minot, North Dakota, that show came to town and tantalized the entire city when its lights, cameras and dumpsters arrived and didn’t just “makeover” someone’s old house – Ty, a gazillion volunteers and not a small number of really well-prepared expert contractors tore down, then put up and finished an entire new house for a family in a week! Look it up...Season 4 Episode 4 August 2006 featuring a really nice and deserving Minot family – the Blivens!

Unlike HGTV personalities that spend other people’s money and sometimes help them make a bunch of money “flippin or sellin” their house, on “Extreme Home Makeover” the recipients weren’t asked for a dime! That was its allure. Ty Pennington had a heart as big as his personality. The shows were extreme feel-good stories – recipients of new or “extremely made-over” houses were folks that had little going for them and a lot in life going against them.

The looks of gratitude on people’s faces when they saw their new digs were precious, but so too the looks of the givers...Ty and all his volunteers and grizzled old electricians and sheet-rockers and anyone else who showed up in a pick-up all showed the same thing on their faces... how good it feels to give.

My family is going get a chuckle out of this because they know *“ol clean and pick up as you walk through the house”* dad, but my other enduring image of EHM is the way the houses sparkled with not a pile in sight! Everything was placed with the occupant’s aesthetic desires and physical needs in mind. They were recipients of a home that was complete and beautiful – made or re-made with delight and in love.

My subject is today is giving – I speak on the theme of our annual appeal *“God so Loved... He Gave”*. As you can tell, that’s based on the great promise from John 3:16. But to begin we go back to Deuteronomy. This tells of when God prepared the land of Canaan for his people Israel – called elsewhere *“the land God swore to give to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”* The emphasis is on “give”. This land was a gift. Moreover, it was, we are told *“a good land.”*

What is going on here, in terms of language if not geography, is a return to Eden – to the place God had prepared for the whole human race, represented by Adam and Eve and known variously as “the garden” or “paradise.” Everything about the world created in Genesis was for our sake not for God’s. It was called a good land – *“tov”* in Hebrew, and in the case of the garden’s human occupants – *“mazel tov”* – very good. Our creation story could be titled *“God so loved... that he gave life and the means to live it well”*.

In Deuteronomy it says the land would bless the people of Israel on the same condition that the garden would have always blessed Adam and Eve and their descendants – the occupants did not forget from whence all the goodness came and received their provision with thanks and humility. We know that didn't happen in the good garden. Deuteronomy and its successor books Joshua and Judges tell us it did not happen in the good land God gave to Israel. Giving is grounded in faith and prompted by gratitude. Both, in the Christian tradition at least, are sustained by memory. If we don't remember we lose perspective and then, as Deuteronomy warns, *"our hearts become proud and we forget the Lord our God."*

When Israel remembered how good they found the "good land" they entered, it would go well with them. Then they would adorn that good land with grateful occupants whose generosity made it an even better land. When a Christian remembers that God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes (itself a gift of the Holy Spirit), that person will not perish but have eternal life. How can such a person not then live a grateful life?

In Deuteronomy 6 Moses tells the people to remember water that ran clear and cool, vineyards already planted, fields white unto harvest, wells dug, and houses ready to be occupied when they entered the land. Theirs was an "extremely well prepared" place to live - as in the beginning. Nothing describes God's character more than grace, and grace is no better defined than by the word "gift". It is God's nature to give...this is how God "so loves."

Generosity isn't born out of abundance - it is born out trust that God is in control, all belongs to Him, and God is generous. Created in God's image and called by baptism to conform our lives to His, it is virtually impossible to conceive of "an ungenerous Christian." The two are almost antithetical. Your past generosity is a memory that gives cause for us to ask expectantly of you for 2022. The prayers of Israel always started with what God had done before. Their faith was their memory. They knew what God was like and therefore were not afraid to ask of God again. We ask of you because we remember what you did when we asked in the past.

So I might re-phrase our theme just a bit to, *"so loved...you and I give."* But I also want you to challenge yourself in your commitments for 2022. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, asks them to give out of their abundance – that could be translated surplus if you wish, but at the same time to be candid, almost ruthlessly honest about how much of what they had truly was surplus. He commanded no hardship even if he extolled and was humbled by how others in Macedonia had given out of their poverty. Paul is not envisioning a church in which everyone is identical in what they have nor in what they give – only that it be done eagerly and honestly. For giving is acceptable to God based on what one has, not on what one does not have.

Please give ample and prayerful thought to what you can and wish to commit to our congregation's ministry in 2022. Do include provision, though not your commitment card but in your heart and your plans, our mission partners, such as our newest one, Care Net. They are worthy of your gifts as well. The abundant grace of the Lord Jesus be upon you all. AMEN