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## “The Love of Christ is Rich and Free.”

I imagine that the Sundays in the season of Easter (and here we are in the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter) can start feeling like the Sundays in the season of Christmas; which is to say, though we may officially still be in that particular season, most people have already moved on.

But sometimes, there are good reasons for remaining aware of the season we're in, because all of the themes and ideas that are associated with that particular season can provide us with a context wherein we can hear a passage of scripture with new ears; and thus better understand the things that God is doing in the world around us.

Psalm 67 is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. I mean, all by itself it's a fine psalm; it's a real gem in fact. But when you hear it being recited in the context of a season in which we're remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus, all of a sudden we're able to connect some dots we weren't even aware were there to be connected.

Let me explain.

One of the really unfortunate ideas that so many people have about the Christian faith, is that the death and resurrection of Jesus took place so that “Our” relationship with God might be restored, and so that “We” might have hope for a new life. And, while on the surface, that notion may sound good, the problem is that it makes the Church— not to mention our faith— an exclusive thing; it’s a notion that divides the world into “We” and “Us” on the one side, and “They” and “Them” on the other. And that’s a problem!

Because the witness of scripture is that biblical faith has *always* been about the people of God working to try and meet the needs of others, and *not* simply having their own needs met. In fact, and from the biblical perspective, the ultimate question that Christians need to ask is not “Will I go to heaven when I die?” (because, quite honestly, that question was dealt with on the Cross), but rather “How can I share the good news, of what God has accomplished in Christ, with the people in the world around me?” That’s the big question.

When I was in highschool, and a member of St. George Episcopal Church in San Antonio, I was part of a Bible study and prayer group for young people my age. One day, and to get our conversation rolling, our leader asked the question “Who is Jesus to you?” Well, I knew the answer to that, and so, right away, I said: “Jesus is my ticket out of Hell!” I was being *serious*. And though I’m embarrassed to admit it now, that response was an accurate reflection of my relationship to God; back then, I was all focused on what *I* could get out of the whole deal.

However, the person sitting next to me was a good friend of mine, and his answer was simply “Jesus is my Lord.” And after we had taken a few moments to reflect on that response, I found myself thinking, “Man, that was a *really* good answer! I wish I had said that.” Because, at that moment, I finally realized just how self-centered, how self-focused, my faith really was.

Fortunately, I’ve finally come to the place in my spiritual journey where I know that the actions of God weren’t for *my* benefit; they were for *our* benefit. And even the author of Psalm 67 understood that; he understood that there’s a purpose behind God blessing us.

In the first verse he writes these words:

“May God be merciful and bless us, show us the light of his countenance and come to us.”

That’s just your standard please-bless-us-God petition. But it’s in the second verse where the psalmist expresses his reason for the request:

“Let your ways be known upon earth, your saving health among all nations.”

Do you see what’s going on? Yes, the psalmist *is* asking for God’s blessing (vs. 1), but he’s doing so *in order that* he might be a part of that process whereby God’s “ways” are made “known upon earth,” and God’s “saving health” is made known “among all nations” (vs. 2).

In other words, Psalm 67 is part of that “blessed to be a blessing” theme that is woven throughout scripture. Because that’s how God operates. In fact, I’ve yet to find an instance in scripture where God blessed a person or group *simply for their own sake*.

Certainly, there are *lots* of examples of God blessing individuals or groups, but there's *always* been an "in order that" clause attached to it.

You see, God's purpose has never been to establish a sort of obstacle course that only a select few will be able to complete; thus earning for them a ticket into Heaven, while all the rest of us are consigned to Hell. Our faith has *never* been about that!

Rather, God's purposes have always been all-inclusive, and all-embracing. And the Christian faith is about joining with God in proclaiming a message similar to what is printed on the back page of our announcements insert: That God loves all people, unconditionally and without exception; and that God invites and welcomes all people, unconditionally and without exception. Period. (Or, as the title of a particular Christian song proclaims, "The love of Christ is rich and free".)

And that, my friends, is why it's called the "*good news*."

We live in a world that is plagued by injustice, and divided by the extremes of poverty and wealth. It's a world torn by racial,

ethnic, and national exclusivism and strife. In other words, it's a world that needs to hear the message of Psalm 67: that God rules this world, and that God intends blessing for *all* the world's people.

In short, Psalm 67 challenges us to rediscover the ancient biblical vision of a world ruled by God, and in which all people have a place. And in the end, this is the essence of our call to be evangelists: to communicate the unqualified love of God for all people, and to communicate it to a world that so desperately needs to hear it.

Amen.