

The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

June 23, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Hebrews 11:24-26

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. (NIV)

In *Readers Digest* I read a rather unique story about the Hampson family. Lynn and Jason Hampson were blessed with a baby boy they named Logan. In the winter of 2008 they first saw the hint of yellow in their four-month-old son's eyes, but they didn't think too much of it. The young parents assumed it was jaundice, a common illness that would pass with a little time under the hospital lamps. Instead, the color spread. By the end of the week, Jason says Logan's entire body was as yellow as a cartoon character. Logan's blood work eventually revealed he was experiencing liver failure. The family was transferred from their local hospital to SickKids hospital in Toronto. The Hampsons didn't know it then, but it's where they would spend much of the next four years.

When the doctors talked about the need for a liver transplant Lynn immediately volunteered. A part of her healthy liver would be cut off and given to her son. As Jason sat in the waiting room he tried not to think that he could lose the two people he loved most in the world. What happiness to hear the surgery was a complete success! Logan was able to return home with a new liver and life.

Months later the couple asked about the dangers of having a second child. The doctors said there was nothing to worry about and in May 2011 their baby daughter Alyson was born. At six months of age little Alyson came down with a slight fever and Jason looked into her eyes and called Lynn in to have a look. Lynn couldn't believe it. Was it real or just paranoia? It was what they had feared the most – the faintest tint of yellow. Tests quickly revealed another case of liver disease. Now it was a race against time. Alyson, like Logan would need a liver transplant, but her mom who had already given a portion of her liver to Logan was not an option. So this time it was dad's turn. Removing about 20 percent of Jason's liver they witnessed another success as Alyson was also now given a working liver. Amazingly, the family is now home together all sharing a common scar and bond.

This true story made me think about what I would be willing to give up. I'm sure with many parents here today we would gladly give up even more than a portion of our livers for our children. What wouldn't we give up for our kids? But what is under consideration for us today is what would we be willing to give up for God? Why does it at times seem like for God we might not make such a big sacrifice? What would we be willing to do without for our Lord? Why does it so often seem to be so little? Just where does Jesus fit in all of this? We know where God should come in our priorities. We realize where Jesus deserves to rank in our lives. We have even heard Jesus tell us: ***“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10).***

As we confess our sins in this area, as we receive once again the Lord's unlimited forgiveness, may we also ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and strength so we might be willing to give up everything for our God! I pray with a new heart and new attitude we put Jesus first and would gladly toss aside anything that gets in the way of our most important relationship of all. I pray we learn that: **Whatever it is – give it up for God!**

Open up and read all Hebrews chapter 11 and you will find a list of people following the command Jesus gives to His disciples in our Gospel lesson this morning. You will read about people who denied themselves. You will read about how these believing men and women picked up their crosses and followed God. You will read about people who willingly gave up their lives and admitted they were strangers here on earth for "*they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one.*" You will read about people who lived by faith and Moses was one of them.

We read: "*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.*" When we think of the life of Moses I don't know how often we think about what Moses gave up by leaving Egypt. I know I didn't. We focus on how Moses' parents hid him in a basket as a baby and how the daughter of Pharaoh found him and took him into her home. We think of how God used those years to train Moses and how God eventually chose Moses. We remember Moses as a great leader leading God's people out of the slavery of Egypt and through the desert.

But how often do we think about what Moses was leaving behind? He lived in a palace. He was trained in all the arts and wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. (Acts 7) He could have kept living the good life. But Moses chose to side with slaves rather than enjoy the pleasures of the palace. Moses willingly gave up great wealth to become a desert wanderer. He refused to be known as Pharaoh's daughter and instead chose to be mistreated with the people of God. Moses decided not to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Moses was willing to give it all up. Why? "*He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*" In short, Moses gave it all up for God. Moses knew the promises of God. The writer of Hebrews even says Moses was willing to suffer disgrace for the sake of Christ. Moses trusted in the promise of a Savior. It was much more important for Moses to be one of God's people rather than revel in the pleasures of sin for a short time. God had much better plans for Moses – an eternal reward. So with faith in God's promises Moses gave it all up – the riches, the palace, the power, "*all the treasures of Egypt*" for God. For God was all that really mattered.

Now I will ask again: What are you willing to give up for God? Would you, unlike the rich man who walked away from Jesus sad, be willing to give up all your money and possessions? Would you give up your friends? Are you willing to give up sinful pleasures that keep pulling you in the opposite direction from Jesus? Would you be willing, like Abraham, to give God your own child? Are you ready to suffer disgrace for the sake of Christ? Do you really fear, love, and trust in God above all things? Are we willing to lose our life for Jesus?

If you are like me we don't want to give an honest answer to such pointed questions. For I have given way too little to God, held onto things and people as if they

were most important, and failed to give God all honor and glory more times than I could even begin to count. When I really think about it I don't know if I understand what sacrificial giving (giving to God to the point it really hurts) even feels like. Too many times I have wanted to keep my life rather than lose it for Jesus.

That is why I seek God's help again today, but not before I ask once again for His forgiveness. Like Moses I am so blessed to live by faith knowing that forgiveness for every single one of these sins is mine. For the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies me from all sin. And I pray you too realize the blessings that come from living by faith. By faith we understand that God is our greatest treasure so that we say with the psalmist: ***"Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Psalm 73).*** By faith we realize that Jesus is more valuable than all the riches in the world. By faith we set our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen knowing that what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal. By faith we, like Moses, begin to recognize that no matter what it is, no matter who it is – whatever it is – it is well worth it to give it up for God.

As we give up whatever it is we need to give up for God, and as we give whatever it is we decide in our hearts to give for God, we do so always remembering what God has first given to us. Every time we look at or walk into our church or almost any other Christian church, we see a cross and are reminded of what Jesus gave up for us. Every time I look at my own children I am reminded of what God gave up for me. For Jesus shed His blood and died to save me. God gave up His Son for me. So now I am glad to lose my life for Him. For I've seen that my Savior's grave is empty and I know His victory is mine. That is love which I can never repay. The scars on Jesus' hands and feet and side tell a true story of sacrifice that is even more amazing than the one about the Hampsons. For Jesus died that we might have life forever! With this in mind how can we refuse to give it up – whatever it is – for God! Amen.