

Hebrews 13:15-16

St Paul's, Glenelg, 12 Pentecost, 2022

Has anyone ever told you that they were pleased with you? People rarely tell us that they are pleased with us. Instead they use their displeasure as a powerful weapon against us. They withhold their approval from us, or ration it, so that they can get what they want from us. So, even though we work hard at pleasing the people that we love or admire, we remain uncertain about whether we have made the grade and unsure about whether we are ever good enough for them

Just imagine what your life would be like if the people that you love and admire told you that they were pleased with you and showed you how pleased they were with you. You would not just flourish as a person but also be happy to do everything possible to please them.

Well let me tell you something wonderful. God the Father is very pleased with each of you who are disciples of Jesus. Like us with others, God shows how pleased he is with you by what he says and does and gives to you. When he looks at you he says: 'You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter; I am well pleased with you.' Like proud parents with their successful children, he is happy with you and how you have turned out. He has rescued you from the world of darkness and adopted you as his children in baptism. He has cleansed you and made you holy with the blood of Jesus. He loves you as much as he loves Jesus and is as pleased with you as he is with Jesus.

Since God the Father is well pleased with us and our faith in Jesus, we need not fear his disapproval, even when we sin. We have no reason to feel worthless and ashamed. Since he has forgiven us and cleansed us, we have a good conscience. We can stand before God the Father together with Jesus, the angels and all his saints. We can come before him here in this service to receive his blessings, all the gifts that he is pleased to give us. He backs up what he says by what he does for us and gives to us.

Here he also equips us with everything good so that we may do his will as he works in us what is well-pleasing in his eyes (Heb 13:21). He equips us with his good gifts so that we can also serve him in a way pleases him. We can please him by what we say and do and give to him. We heard about that last Sunday when then author of Hebrews encouraged us with these words: **Since we are**

receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God in a well pleasing way with reverence and awe.

This Sunday we hear that God is not just happy with us as his children but also with what we do as a congregation in our service of worship. He is very pleased with the three offerings that we present as a sacrifice to him: our songs of praise, our good works, and our money. They are called sacrifices because they are offered to God in response to all that he has given to us. These three sacrifices are well-pleasing to God

1. Through Jesus let us continually/regularly offer a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that openly confess his name.

In the OT the priests presented a sacrifice to God each morning and evening at the temple. That sacrifice consisted of two things. On one hand, the priests presented the burnt offering of the meat and blood from a male lamb on the altar for burnt offering to atone for the sins of the congregation and cleanse them from impurity. On the other hand, the temple choir sang a psalm of praise as that offering was burnt up on the altar, a psalm that was addressed to the congregation and told it what God was giving them, a psalm by which the choir called the congregation to join them in their song of praise.

The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that we have no need to offer any sacrifice to pay for sin, because Jesus has done that for us. So the main sacrifice that we now offer to God is a song of praise as our thank offering to him. Together with the angels we are part of his heavenly choir here on earth. Even though we offer our songs of praise to God the Father, we address them mainly to each other and the world. We tell each other how good he is and what great things he has done for us and all people. We tell each other how well he treats us and what good gifts he gives us through his word in our service of worship. So Paul tells us in Col 3:16: **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with grace in our hearts to God.**

We offer our songs of praise to God **through** Jesus and together with him. He is our choir conductor who teaches us how to praise God by his words that fill us with his Holy Spirit. He leads us in our songs of praise and gives

us his Spirit to inspire us. He puts his song in our hearts and fills them with God's goodness and mercy.

Through Jesus we don't just offer up our songs of praise **regularly** every Sunday in our service of worship; we take them out into our lives and offer them **continually** because we know them by heart. He turns us into people whose whole lives are full of thanksgiving and praise. We have his song in our hearts.

Well, why is God so pleased with our sacrifice of praise? It is obvious that he does not need our praises. But we do. And so too do those who are not yet believers. We all need to know how good God is; we need to know that he showers his gifts on us in the church and in the world; we need to believe in him as our Benefactor and receive all the good things that he wants to give us. Our problem is that we don't expect enough from him. Or else we expect what is not good for us. By praising him our eyes are opened to see more of all that we have from him and how much more he has in store for us. By praising him we enjoy what has given us; we don't just enjoy what we receive from him, but we also enhance our all too limited capacity for spiritual enjoyment. True enjoyment leads to praise; and praise leads to enjoyment.

2. **Do not forget to do good..., for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**

This does not refer to all the work that we do; it refers to the work that we do for God and together with him. It is, mainly but not only, the work that do together with each other and separately in this congregation. Earlier in his letter the author assured his hearers that God would no overlook their work and the love they had shown to God by serving their fellow saints (6:10). He had also urged them to provoke each other to good works of love by their good works (10:24).

Just think for a moment of all the work that is done in this congregation so that we meet together each Sunday for worship. Think of all that is done by so many different people from our pastor to the greeters, from the prayers that we all offer to music offered by our musicians, from care provided by our pastoral assistants to the work done by property committee, from

those who clean our buildings to those who speak to visitors. And so on! All these are good works that are well-pleasing to God. People do them voluntarily in gratitude to him because they want to please him. He notes them all and is pleased with those who give of themselves and their time to him. Even though they are all done by people individually, they are done together with Jesus and as part of this congregation. Since these deeds are offered by faith in God and in love for the people in our congregation, they are holy work done by holy people. There is nothing menial or insignificant about any of these good works. They are all extraordinary and far more valuable than we realize.

So on God's behalf let me thank you all for your participation this congregation and for all that you do in it and for it. Most of that is unnoticed by the rest of us. But not by God! He is very pleased with all that you have done and wants to encourage you to do whatever he calls you to do as part of this congregation, even if you only attend our services and join with us in our worship of God.

3. Do not forget...to share what you have, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

In every service a collection is taken and offered to God. In the early church and in some parts of world today it was mostly the offering of foodstuff. For us it consists mainly of money together with some items of food in a basket. This collection is brought forward after the sermon in response to all that God has given to us and consecrated with a prayer. That offering is presented in a way that disguises who gives what, and how much; it makes the collection the offering of the whole congregation. It is a congregational offering to God, just as our intercessions are a congregational prayer.

While the money is used to support Pastor Tim, the work of our congregation, and the mission of the LCA, the food in the basket is for the needy people that seek help from us in Community Care. The offering of some of our money acknowledges that all our possessions come as a gift from God. Since God has been so generous to us he moves us to be generous to others. He does not need our money, but others do. That includes our pastor and the people who come for help in Community Care.

Our generosity shows others how generous God is by giving us Jesus and everything else that we need physically and spiritually. It shows our faith in God for all that we need and our trust in him for our livelihood. It is a concrete confession of reliance on him as our God rather than our possessions and money.

So no wonder God is well-pleased with the money that we offer each Sunday. No wonder God is especially pleased with the help that we provide for disadvantaged people in Community Care.

Some years ago I read the story of a man with a very demanding father who never showed his approval of his son and his accomplishments. He was always critical of him and all that he did. Nothing that he did seemed ever good enough for his father. Then when the father died, the son found his diary in his desk. Imagine how surprised he was to discover that his father was pleased with him and his marriage and even more pleased with his career and all that he accomplished as a doctor. No wonder the son was disappointed and angry. He felt cheated because his fear of his father's disapproval had crippled him emotionally and robbed him of so much enjoyment.

Well that's not how God the Father is with you. Through his words and deeds and gifts he shows you how well pleased he is with you. He is not just pleased with you as his dear children who belong to his holy family. He is also pleased with what you are doing right here and now as a congregation. He is pleased with the songs of praise that you have sung and will sing, your involvement with him and each other in this service, and your offering to him after this sermon. Best of all, he shows you how pleased he is with you by the warm reception that you receive from him in Holy Communion. There he equips you with every good thing that you need to do what pleases him, and works in you what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Heb 13:21).