

Victory of the Lamb – November 11, 2018 – Imitating God: Living Generously Series

Matthew 9:9-13 – The Open Door – Pastor Bill Limmer

Well we are just about in the middle of a series called Imitating God: Living Generously. So far we have seen that God is absurdly generous. Remember my cupboard with 56 glasses and mugs plus 40 more for Christmas. Remember the 100 billion stars in our galaxy. And that God has given us not just glasses and stars but his best, his son Jesus, to be our Savior. Last week we drilled down into God's generosity and discovered that God absolutely loves to pour blessings out on us and he wants us to use some of those blessings that we have received to bless others in need of compassion.. Today we are going to look at how Generous God is when it comes to invitations. I have to be honest, I got overwhelmed working on this message because God is so generous in his invitations to us. I had trouble picking and choosing. I seriously almost broke down and cried. I was truly feeling overwhelmed. And then God had me remember the circumstance, he is so absurdly generous in his invitations! We are just going to look at a couple of Jesus invitations to you today. I just want you to know for you, for you, the door is open. And God is generous in his invitation to you and all people.

Here is an invitation from Jesus to you. Matthew 11:28 **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** There are men and women who are rich yet are held in the grip of insecurity; intellectual people who have lost their way; strong people who live in fear of weakness and defeat. Know anyone like that. Friends do you know anyone who tries to jump start their morning with a cup of coffee because from the second the alarm goes off or even before it is game on! The kids have to get up and get dressed, there is cooking breakfast, maybe even just tossing a bowl of cereal together, or opening up the box of pop tarts, shoving them off to school. And all the while the inner voice is saying, "you are not enough." Know anyone like that. Then there is Tina. She is 15 and wants to try out for the cheerleading squad but she is not sure she is pretty enough, talented enough, has the right friends, wears the right clothes, wears the right perfume. She wonders if the boys notice her. She is a good student but that actually just adds pressure because it is the one thing she has going for her. There is so much going on in her mind, she is exhausted. Know anyone like that? These are just a couple of stories but if you have ever felt the need to be good enough for God, to seek approval from others, or to perform and still felt unacceptable no matter how hard you strived – then you know something about the law. It is impossible to bear, and therein lies perfectionism, self-condemnation, guilt and shame. You will end up exhausted, feeling like you haven't accomplished anything or that you are worthless. Jesus invites you, Come and I will give you rest. You don't have to be good enough for God. The cross of Jesus freed us from that soul-breaking burden and lets you experience the blessing of being loved over being good enough. You see, for you and for me and for those who are not Christians, Christianity is all about grace, the very grace of God. The door is open. You are welcome to come in. That's for you. You are invited. But it is also for the person sitting next to you so tell them, "You are invited."

Here is another invitation from Jesus for you. **As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.** ¹⁰ **While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.** ¹¹ **When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"** ¹² **On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.** Matthew is not the most reputable guy around. He was a tax collector. Tax collector translated for you and me today is an extortionist. As the people traveled

along in ancient times they had to pay taxes at the tax booth. You could kind of think of traveling in IL. You have to pay the toll. Only the price on the highway was not clearly marked and there was no I pass. You had to stop and pay. And pay whatever the tax collector said you had to pay or you couldn't proceed. Consequently, tax collectors were very much disliked, looked at as cheats and thieves and since they were working with the foreign government they were also considered traitors and renegades. That is Matthew. Just the kind of person Mom wants you to bring home for Thanksgiving. It kind of reminds of the last time I was flying out of Lusaka and I had not had any problems at the airport before but this time. For my second piece of luggage the airport clerk wanted to charge me \$100. That is interesting I said. I have been through here any number of times and I have never had to pay before. He got up and said he would check with his supervisor. He was gone for a few minutes and came back and said, his supervisor said that I didn't need to pay. But I am sitting on the plane and the man next to me starts talking about having to pay \$100 for his second piece of luggage. The clerk was an extortionist. Well that was Matthew. And when Jesus calls Matthew to follow him Matthew has his hand caught in the cookie jar of extortion. Jesus didn't wait for Matthew to clean up his life, get his act together before he offered him the open door of the rest of forgiveness and new life. Matthew is so moved by his forgiveness that he invites his friends (understand that is going to be his work buddies – other sinners) to meet Jesus. The self-righteous can't believe this is happening. And so they are picketing and protesting. They are frantic and irate. They are blasting Jesus because he is hanging around sinful people and so he must be sinful too. And Jesus responds, **it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.** So if you are not ok, come on in. Jesus has opened his heart and door for you. You are invited.

Jesus has another invitation for you. Final invitation this morning “Jesus said to them, **‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men’**” (Mark 1:17). Here is what I have noticed, maybe you have too. Not many people go out to eat alone. Not many people go to a movie alone. Not many people go to a football game alone. Not too many people not affiliated with a church will go to church alone. You see where I am going here? We know that everybody in southeastern WI and beyond is welcome here. But most people in southeastern WI don't know that or they just need a little encouragement. Understand it is not going to be non-Christians who spread this message of hope and love to people who don't know God. It is going to be Christians who spread and share the love of Jesus. There are people you know who think God will never love them because they've made such a mess of their lives. But you know God wants them to come as they are. Help them hear the Good News from Jesus. Invite them to come to church with you this coming Sunday, Thanksgiving Eve so that might know the who, what, when, where and even the why. Speaking of Thanksgiving Eve, we proved God's generosity last year didn't we. You never know what might happen on Thanksgiving Eve. I wonder what is going to happen this year. I am willing to bet you will be blown away by generosity.

Leah works at a local restaurant on Sundays. She hears how you talk about church. How you really liked the song or how the message was especially impactful to you. She even heard you say that Jesus has an open door policy. Now Leah is trying to figure out life and the struggle is real. She often feels worthless. She knows she is not the greatest of people, she has regrets but she tries. She wonders why Christians come in and consider her lost but don't invite her if she is beyond hope. She is thinking if what you have is so good that you would tell her unless of course she is worthless. She needs to know there is more to life than serving omelettes, pancakes and coffee. She actually needs you. She will likely be very grateful. She may run away or even call you a name under her breath or even audibly but this is more important than your safety or our ego. Don't give up on her. There are people you know who think God will never love them because they've made such a mess of their lives. But you know God wants them to come as they are. You know that because Jesus has invited you no questions asked no performance necessary. We get to spread this message of hope and love to people who don't know God. Tell Leah's in your

life “you are invited this coming weekend, Thanksgiving Eve, Christmas Eve.” It’s such a simple thing to do, but it can make a difference that will last for eternity.” It is easier not to invite her – I get it. But you have the generous God to share. The height of selfishness is being content to go to heaven alone. Jesus died on the cross and rose three days later so heaven can be full of you and me’s and other you and me’s.!

Eric walked into the ministry center and walked up to the Welcome Center. He asked the young woman who was sitting behind the desk, “Is it ok if I become a Christian?” The college student freaked out came running to my office and said there is a guy out there wanting to know if he can be a Christian. I remember smiling from ear to ear saying, “Yeah, we allow for that here.” I went up front and met Eric. Showed him around the ministry center. And when we came to the worship space and I opened the door, he hesitated and asked, “Can I go in there because I am not a Christian?” For those of us who are Christians we know everybody is welcome but not everybody, like Eric, know they are welcome. I implore you to extend Christ’s invitation, the very one you received to someone else. The power of invitation to the good news of Jesus Christ is an invitation for hope for today and a hope that outlasts today, a hope for eternity.

According to Google. The average person in the US has 600 friends. Of that I’m told that between 10-25 are people that really trust you. And that you have 8.6 really close friends. This isn’t counting relatives. And word of mouth is still the best way because you know your friends personally. Word of mouth capitalizes on trust. Your friends trust you and you are believable to them. So here is what I’m thinking, if you know anyone who is perfect, they have no worries or concerns, you don’t need to be concerned about inviting them. If on the other hand, you know someone who is not perfect, feel free to invite them to join you here with other imperfect people and an imperfect pastor who will invite everyone to receive the perfect Savior.

You know how generous God is in invitation? He invites us even if we don’t invite others. He is that serious and loving about his invitations to you.