



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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**SERMON – 24<sup>TH</sup> PENTECOST/CHRIST THE KING  
MALACHI 3:6-12 & LUKE 17:20-21  
NOVEMBER 20, 2022  
“THE KINGDOM”**

In 1998, I was an intern at St. Olaf Lutheran in Grenora, ND. That fall I was asked by my supervisor to do a funeral for a man named Henry Grev. Henry was a good friend of my supervisor. Henry was a kind and godly man I was told, though I don't think I'd ever met him. He farmed the rocky soil of Williams County his whole life, and as best I recall his family said he'd climbed in the combine earlier that fall – nothing a farmer loves more than to cut some grain and get it in the bin.

But some after the first snow started dusting the prairie, Henry died. I was pretty nervous doing a funeral for a man I'd never met who I knew was so well regarded by his community and sorely missed by his family. I did the best I could – and I thought it went pretty well.

Some weeks later, Marcella and I and the girls went to Minot – I was doing my chaplaincy training at the time at Trinity Hospital there and the family came along for a weekend away. On the way out of town we stopped at the post office and got our Friday mail. A few miles down the road Marcella open an envelope said, “what's this?” ‘This’ was a check from the Zahl elevator for something like \$616.26 – a grain check made out to me. Some mistake we figured, till we noticed in the memo line it was for a hundred some odd bushels of wheat that may even have been owned by Henry Grev, but anyway was directed our way by his son Stan.

It may not have been a large sum to either man – as I recall the Grevs' did farm a decent number of acres – but it was a small fortune to this intern and his family. It may have even meant an upgrade from fast food to a sit-down restaurant for the Nelsons that night – and I know our girls wondered why mom and dad said they could order pop instead of water for a change! Looking back, I'd have to say it was a sign of God's kingdom doing its thing.

To some Pharisees who wanted signs from Jesus that the kingdom of God he'd been preaching was coming, Jesus said, and I'm paraphrasing here a bit...*don't look around, look within*. I think Lord is saying our eyes and ears will deceive us, but our hearts won't. Luther said, “*God's kingdom comes when our Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that by grace we believe his word and live godly lives on earth now and in heaven forever.*” But I believe that the kingdom comes in the form of grain checks to unsuspecting interns now and then too.

We don't look at a church or a cathedral or a mission hospital or a shelter for the homeless one day and suddenly believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. We believe those things because Jesus our King told us they are ours – they are his gifts to us. Those things, forgiveness, resurrection to life eternal, are invisible things, we can't point to them and say “look...I'm forgiven”. But they become visible when our belief in them influences the kind of people we are and what we do.

What I am asking you today is to give as generously as possible to the work of our congregation and, the work of our wider church body the NALC. We depend on you greatly and thank you sincerely for what you give. We've tried to make the case for what your giving enables here at Calvary, and also in the NALC. I shared the story from my internship because its an enduring memory the support of the Grev family when I was in seminary. I'm thankful Calvary has agreed to host Ben and Amy this year. Internship is an important time in the development of pastors. Remember, the largest portion of whatever you pledge to the NALC will be for the support of our seminary and future pastors.

(By the way, if you happen to have a few excess bushels of grain laying around at some elevator, you might think of sending it Ben and Amy's way!) I don't know if Stan Grev remembers what he did...but I always will! I learned how humbling it is to be the recipient of a gift and what an encouraging thing at the same time. The past 23 years my family has depended on the giving of the congregations I've served – we'll never forget that. I think it has helped make me a better giver myself.

As humbling as it is to be a recipient, I have learned it is joyful to be a giver. In our lesson today from Malachi, the prophet is pretty darn candid with the people of Israel on the subject of giving. That's what a prophet was for I suppose – telling vital if challenging truths. Israel was losing it's way by not being faithful givers. Earlier in Malachi, the prophet chastised them for bringing old or lame livestock for offerings, instead of the best of their flocks. God was in so many words getting the leftovers when he'd asked for Israel's first fruits. That would not do.

But God our King says nothing that is not for our good. Even though the prophet says the people were "robbing God" – you know in truth they were robbing themselves. Giving expands faith, it enlarges us as people, making us what we were created to be – grateful beneficiaries and conduits of God's grace. "*Test me in this*" God said – see if when you give you do not grow.

The joy of generosity is real -it's a sign of the kingdom within. Congregations and seminaries and are to – they are visible aspects of the kingdom God, and they need support. So, I want to close by praying this prayer composed by our Bishop Dan Selbo, adopted to include Calvary congregation with our church body the NALC as we make our pledges, and bring some things out of our storehouses into God's.

Let us pray...