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Sermon Transcript: Be Different

"Everything's better frozen" was the phrase repeated one summer I worked at Camp Geneva in Michigan. We said, "Everything's better frozen" with glee as we grabbed things from the cafeteria and put them in the freezer in the staff lounge or grabbed campfire snacks and found their way to the freezer. There were things like chocolate, marshmallows, but also blueberries, grapes, carrots, celery, Cheerios, trail mix—you name it. It really—it ended up in the staff freezer because "everything's better frozen" was what we just kept saying all summer.

See, when I was in college, my—one of my pastors suggested that I apply to work at this camp in Michigan. I had told him that I felt called to go into ministry, and he suggested that it would be good for me. He was a very wise pastor. It was good for me. So, I applied to work at Camp Geneva in Holland, Michigan, and was hired. And I didn't know much about it. I'd never been there, but my parents drove me up at the beginning of the summer and dropped me off and away my summer went. It was a completely different world.

Counselors were called Aunt this and Uncle that. And so I quickly got used to be calling—be called Aunt Alex long before I had a biological niece or nephew. It was totally different than anywhere I'd ever been before. After worship on Sundays—worship services were in the gym and there would be hundreds of community members that would come to hear a rotating cast of local pastors—and after worship, the camp staff would just turn around and start picking up the chairs, even if it wasn't their job. There were a couple people assigned to do that, but if you were there, you just started picking up chairs. It was really different.

At meals on weekends, it didn't matter where you sat. There weren't cliques. You just sat wherever and the mix of people at your table was what it was. And that changed from meal to meal. And it was just fine. On Sunday nights, we had staff meeting and dinner and afterwards there was this tradition of going to the local ice cream place and not everyone had a car and so the people with cars would wait until everyone was there and make sure everyone had a ride before they left. It was different. It's just a different mindset. It was an unselfish mindset that permeated the whole culture at the camp. It was different, but in a really good way, which makes sense, frankly, right? You would hope it should be different if a group of young adult Christians are teaching kids about Jesus all summer. It should be different, right? But that was the first time that I truly understood Christian community to be different, the way it's supposed to be. There was a different way of life that was not self-centered, but it was community-centered. We just did what was best for the community all summer long.

On weekends, those who stuck around and had cars would offer to take those without cars. I was one of them. Remember, my parents just dropped me off. They would say, "I'm going to the store. Do you need anything? Do you need to go to the store?" The concern was just, "Does everyone have what they need?" The "everything's better frozen" slogan was just a byproduct of a bunch of kooky counselors who were running on very little sleep. But there were rules because teenagers and college students left unchecked—well, you can't just appeal to their mature brains, can you? The human brain isn't fully developed until around age—around age 30, they say. So, there were rules. We signed a covenant at the beginning of the summer. No drinking, no drugs, follow curfew, etc. And there were consequences if that was broken, which side note was why on my 21st birthday, I sat on the beach of Lake Michigan watching the sunset drinking a root beer with friends. It's very

memorable.

The Structure of the Clean Slate

When it came to the Israelites and caring for the poor, God knew that God couldn't appeal to goodwill alone. God knew they needed guidance, rules, structure. And so we get this structure, this command that every seventh year there is a remission of debts because as Pastor Rob said a few weeks ago, the Israelites were once slaves in Egypt. They had a totally different way of living that was more egalitarian. Life centered around families and clans and they held property in, like, a group trust. And so society had significantly changed for them by now. They were living in a more individualistic, capitalistic, debt-driven, landowning economy—much more selfish. And disparities were growing among them.

God knew that without some type of restraint or pressure, the unchecked commerce of the time would create gross disparities. Sound familiar? Perhaps because in 2026 there are currently roughly 37 million Americans living below the poverty line. And yet the wealthiest American is worth \$428 billion, and the second wealthiest is worth \$276 billion. Without some type of restraint or pressure, gross disparities happen. And it can be easy to get into the mindset of "there's not enough, we don't have enough." But let's not get it twisted. There is enough. God has given us enough. It's not because God hasn't provided. God has. It's because we are humans and we are broken. And we chase after wealth and power, and unchecked, that leads to people who have an unfathomable amount and many who don't know how to even afford basic necessities.

So God said, "Hey, here is a system to prevent the significant wealth difference. A system to prevent others from having way too much and others from having not enough. A system that would create a community where there would be"—verse four—"no need among you." But if you pay attention to the scripture passage, verse five goes on to say, "If only—if only you will obey God by diligently observing this commandment. If only you will live differently than the culture around you. If only you will be different, then there will be no need among you." God gave them a different standard to live by, a different expectation, a different way of being in community.

The Reality of Our Brokenness

One commentary I read said, "A clean slate every seven years ought to prevent the consolidation of power and the disempowering and dehumanizing of others because it makes us mutual caregivers." It ought to. Obviously, that hasn't worked out. So, where is the good news in our message today? I think the good news in this passage is that God knows. God knows our brokenness. God knows that we have a tendency to be hard-hearted or tight-fisted—it's very visual language. God knows that we couldn't pull this command off. And so this passage concludes with, "Since there will never be—there will never cease to be some need on the earth, I therefore command you: open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land." God knew. God knows that we will fall short. But that doesn't mean that we aren't called to live differently, to try our best to fight against inequalities and gross economic disparities, to be different in a good way.

Now, I didn't see any of your names on the *Forbes* billionaires list—and we won't fix, let me know if I'm wrong, and we won't fix gross disparities overnight—but we can focus on this community.

Through things like Needs Among Us and our food resource and just conversations with others, we can be different and we can make sure that people have what they need in this community.

We don't have to live by the motto, "everything's better frozen," putting every food item we can get in the freezer. But we are called to create a community that lives differently, opening our hands and fighting to make sure that everyone has what they need.

Amen. Amen.