

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

We Are Generosity

Epistle Lesson

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (NRSVUE)

⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written,

“He scatters abroad; he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us, ¹²for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your partnership with them and with all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in our third week of a Sermon Series titled, “We Are Manchester.” Our Mission Statement at Manchester UMC is: “We are called to make a difference for Christ by transforming church and community.”

And so in this series, we will be looking at different areas of ministry that make up the identity of Manchester UMC, and what our particularities as Manchester UMC are in those ministry areas as we live into our mission together. This week we are talking about Generosity. As with all other aspects of discipleship, when we think about Generosity we look to the example of Christ, the one who gave everything so that we might know the abundant love of God.

Our scripture for this week comes from the book of 2nd Corinthians. This book is thought to be a collection of multiple letters, and chapters 8-9 are clearly a letter asking for money. It is, in short, a fundraiser.

In this letter, Paul was asking the churches of Corinth to give to support the churches of Jerusalem, who were struggling. And rather than focus on the amount that was needed, he focused on the motivation for giving in the first place. He asked that the churches in Corinth give “not regretfully or under compulsion,” but rather to give with joy. He asked the Corinthians to give as an expression of the love they profess.

When it comes to our generosity, motivation matters.

In the United Methodist Book of Discipline, congregations are told to “find creative ways to turn their congregations into tithing congregations with an attitude of generosity.” (P. 258.4) Notice that our tradition emphasizes the motivation – an “attitude of generosity.” Our call to tithe (give 10% of our income to the General Fund) is not an obligation or a compulsion, but arises from our attitude.

Christians do not tithe because we have to, but because we want to, in response to the experience of God’s grace. God’s generosity is an expression of divine love. We have been given quite literally everything that we are because God loves the world, and we are a part of the world that God loves so dearly. Motivated by this love, and a desire to share that love with the world around us, we give.

In fact, John Wesley called Methodists to mature in faith our hearts are “habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor.” The most important word in that sentence may not be “love;” it may actually be “habitually.” How much growing do we have to do before love becomes a habit? And as that happens, as love so fills our hearts that it motivates all we do and say and think and feel, then we will discover the true joy of giving.

Pastor Andy Bryan likes to say that giving an offering is the equivalent of transferring funds from your “home account” to your “church account.” Our generosity matters, and undergirds everything we do to make a difference for Christ in the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it so hard for many people to talk about money?
2. What is your motivation for your financial discipleship? Why do you give?
3. Generosity Team member Susanne Mertens pointed out that, “A tithe is a freely given offering, the initial 10% of your income, undesignated for any specific purpose. Financial gifts given to specific ministries or particular fundraisers are not a part of a tithe, and are considered to be above-and-beyond giving.” Do you find this distinction to be helpful? Why or why not?
4. How does it impact you to be seen so clearly and known so fully and loved so dearly by Jesus?
5. Did you learn anything new about generosity that will impact your motivation for giving?

Prayer

Generous God, everything we have, and everything we are, and everything we ever will be comes from you. Your generosity flows from your love for this world, and in response to your love, we give our gifts. Bless our offerings, that we may continue to make a difference for you in our life together. In Jesus’ name and in the presence of your Spirit, Amen.

“If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable.” (2 Corinthians 8:8)