

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Grounded in Gratitude

Sermon Reflection Notes

This week marks the beginning of the public phase of our Renew. Restore. Rejoice. Capital Campaign and the first of the sermons in the Generosity sermon series. Pastor Ron reminded us that our mission as a church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world which we do through loving God and loving neighbor. The building we worship in is a gift designed to strengthen our disciple-making, not hinder it. And yet, we know that maintaining a building takes time and money, and our church has many things that need to be replaced or renewed. We are beginning a Capital Campaign to ensure that the heating systems or the AV systems don't impede the amazing work being done by the people who make up Manchester UMC.

Christians have much to say about generosity. In Galatians, Paul says that the Holy Spirit produces fruit in people's lives, which doesn't mean things like pomegranates or cherries, but rather love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The word *goodness* is derived from the Greek word *agathos*. *Agathos* indicates an active, generous goodness or benevolence. Goodness means sharing what you have. It means giving yourself for others. Generosity is a fruit of the spirit.

The book of Acts is full of stories about how the earliest Christians shared what they had with one another and with those in need. In fact, in the fourth century, when Julian was emperor of the Roman Empire, he wrote a letter to a pagan high priest complaining about the growth of Christianity and the generosity of the early Christians. He said: *"For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us."* Christians were so generous, and gave so freely of their resources to support the work of the faith, that they made other religions look bad.

When people scoff at the way churches spend money on candles and choir robes instead of giving it all away to help the poor, Pastor Ron said he wants to yell "You don't know the people at Manchester UMC!" Generosity is what we do. There is a strong link between one's faith and one's generosity. It was true in the book of Acts. It was true in the fourth century. And it is true today.

This week, we are invited to think about all the ways God has been generous to us. The scripture lesson for the week is Luke's version of the Last Supper. Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it away. We are invited to think about what Jesus might have been giving thanks for. What they were doing in Luke's Gospel was celebrating the Passover feast, the very meal we heard about in the Exodus passage a week ago. The story that was to be told to all future generations about how death passed over the Israelites' homes. Jesus may also have been giving thanks for how the God of Moses lead the Hebrew people out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. How God remained, and remains, faithful, even when the people grumbled. Throughout the Bible, we find that God is generous. God is constantly pouring out generosity.

We took communion this week and celebrated the Great Thanksgiving. We give our praise and thanks to God, who is so abundantly generous. Every day that we live is a gift from God. Our very lives, and all the best parts of them, are gifts from God. And the appropriate response and posture is gratitude.

What it means to worship can be captured in two words: Thank You. If we were to strip away everything we do on a Sunday morning in worship to keep only the bare minimum needed for worship, what remains is Word and Table. The word of God, the scriptures, and the table where we give thanks over the bread, break it, and give it. What we sing, what we pray, what we do, is all meant to strengthen those two things.

These gifts from a generous God are gifts that are meant to change our lives. We worship a generous God, and that should lead us to become a generous people. The message this week is not "God is generous, give more" though. It is that our whole lives ought to be oriented toward thanksgiving and generosity. God has given so much; and so, we give ourselves fully to God who transforms us and continually makes us new.

Scripture

Luke 22: 14-20

¹⁴When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, ¹⁶for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves, ¹⁸for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Discussion Questions

1. When we hear about "fruits of the spirit" in Galatians, we are pointed to a rubric of sorts to help us discern whether the Holy Spirit is really at work within us. Things like joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are listed as examples of 'good fruit.' Pastor Ron also said generosity is a fruit of the Spirit. Generosity and gratitude are intrinsically linked though. Think about some of the most gratitude-filled people you've ever known. What were the outward signs of their gratitude? Inward signs? Other attributes they possessed?
2. What are some of our stories in the Bible that demonstrate God's radical generosity toward God's people?
3. What are some of the stories from Manchester UMC that demonstrate God's radical generosity in the life of our church?
4. Describe what a 'posture of gratitude' might look like.
5. What things do our culture and world teach that as Christians we need to set aside to maintain a posture of gratitude? How do we actually set those things aside?
6. Research continually shows that generosity is linked with finding meaning and joy in life. Moreover, those who are most generous report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction regardless of their financial circumstances. What is the best way to convince others that these statistics are actually true? How might we sow seeds of future gratitude and generosity?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, we often consider your promises to us, your commandments that guide us, and your deliverance for us when we are in troubled times. But beyond your commandments, beyond your promises, beyond your deliverance, we notice that you are a God who is a **giving** God.

You give us worlds of beauty and abundance. You give us sustenance for each day. You give us your very self, in your beloved son. You give us life.

And all too often we respond with worry about scarcity, caught in the belief that we have already given enough, caught in the fear that we have to earn your good gifts.

Stop us in our tracks, O God, to let go of our fears and grow toward the likeness of you, grow toward your love for us and for our neighbor. Free us from our anxiety and move us toward gratitude. May it be the kind of gratitude that brings love and hope; a gratitude that is transformative both for us and for all of creation. We pray in the name of the One who emptied himself, even for us. Amen.

"I am no longer my own, but thine."