



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

What We Value: Generosity

A third sermon in the series on UMCg Values by Pastor Rob Hamilton.
Delivered on January 22, 2023 on Mark 12:41-44 NRSVUE

41 He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Generosity: we share our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

Preamble

We are in the middle of a series that seeks to root us in the Gospel as the source for our values as a congregation. Our values as we collectively discerned are: inclusion, welcoming, generosity, compassion, open-minded and serving others. I started off with our top-voted value of inclusion and we said of **inclusion that at UMCg: We boldly love and accept people for who they are.** My message last week explored the second highest ranked value of “**Welcoming**” where we defined it to mean that: “**We invite our community into our home with open arms.**”

This week the value under consideration is generosity and we said of **generosity at UMCg that “We share our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.”** These five things are what we commit to sharing when we join the United Methodist Church. Now we derive this expression of generosity not just from our church tradition, but from Jesus, who shows us the internal or spiritual posture that is required to be able to be generous with our prayers, presence, gifts service, and witness.

Before I invite us to pray, if you are bracing yourself for a message that is seeks to empty your pockets, let me put you at ease; the thing I hope for is that this message expands our hearts, not to shake you down for money. Let’s pray for the Spirit’s help today:

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus,

Thank you for your Spirit that is set loose upon all flesh. I thank you for your Spirit that moves in this church through the Moving Forward Initiative calling us to find



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a new identity and calling in you. Keep your Spirit moving in us now, in my words, in their hearing and in their doing - that we might follow your Spirit's leading faithfully as your people called United Methodist of Geneva. Amen.

Sermon

The passage Jim read for us today is commonly known as the widow's mite. A mite, in Jesus' time, wasn't a form of currency. A mite was a coin when the first English Bibles were written and represented the smallest form of currency, our passage today calls the widow's coins pennies. In Jesus's time the smallest amount of Jewish currency was a lepton, and it was worth roughly 6 minutes of a daily wage.



So, Jesus is sitting in the temple people-watching, praying, waiting or something and he sees this poor widow put in these two leptons and calls his disciples together to tell them she has given more than all the rest, even the wealthy folks, because she gave out of the fullness of her life to God.

Some commentators have suggested that this whole scene seeks to condemn the religious leaders who would reduce widows to poverty and then also encourage them to make pious donations beyond their means. So rather than commending the widow's generosity, Jesus is condemning both the social system that renders her poor, and the value system that motivates her action, and he condemns the people who conditioned her to do it." I'm not sure this is an 'either/or' story. Like I said before, this message isn't designed to empty our pocketbooks, but to expand our hearts.

Even if the widow was exploited, her heart is large. She is willing to give not just some of what she has to God, but to give it all to God. And **what God wants more than anything is not that which moth and rust destroy, but our whole hearts.** This is because God opened God's own heart fully to the world in Jesus - risking it all to be generous with us. The New Testament letter to the Philippians makes this point.

Jesus lives his life with an abundance mindset, and he preaches that we do not need to live with a scarcity mindset. Instead, he insists that can live with an abundance mindset, that God will provide for all our needs freeing us to share all that we have and all that we are generously. This of course is paradox because we all know scarcity is a reality in our world – as it was in his day.

Nevertheless, here are some examples where Jesus tried to teach us about living in an abundance mindset:



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Luke 12:22-34

22 And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! 25 And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life’s span? 26 If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not



keep worrying. 30 For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. 31 But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. 33 “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make

yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” - Here Jesus is saying we don't need to worry about our needs, because God will supply them and yet reality teaches us sometimes that isn't true - no wonder we sometimes depend on a scarcity mindset for survival.

Jesus also told a parable that is recorded in three gospels about a Sower going out to sow seed and how the Sower spreads the seed everywhere - even in poor soil conditions - to spread love wastefully, like God does, and calling us to know hold back.



In Matthew 10, Jesus talks about being welcomed with open arms and generously sharing and not holding back when he says: “40 “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent

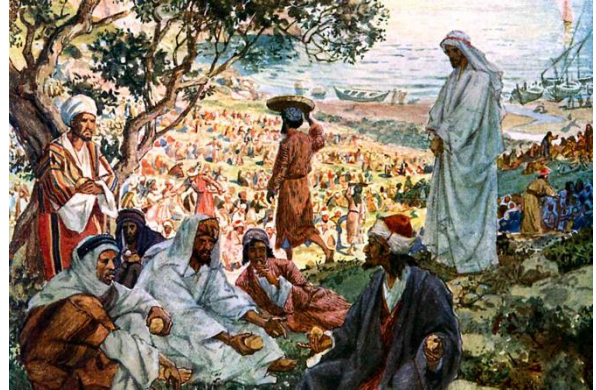


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me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous, 42 and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Then of course there are the feeding miracles, where just some bread and fish fed thousands with leftovers at the end of the miraculous feast. Trying to prove to us that there really is enough in the world to have our needs met when we rely on God.

At the same time, because we know that there is inequality in the world and have experienced the struggle or trauma of not having enough money, food, love, attention, safety, education, privilege and so on - it is easy for us to hold back our prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness, as an act of self-preservation. But we also know as Paul quotes Jesus (from some unidentified source” in Acts 20:35 **“35 In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”** We know sharing is hard unless we have love for others in our heart - which seems to be one antidote to a scarcity mindset.



Just before the pandemic a group of kids were offered the chance at being generous or think of themselves at Christmas time and here is how it played out - perhaps they have something to help us be generous like Jesus. [Click here to watch video.](#)

The kids in the video gave because of love of other's their family. God gave us Jesus, and forgiveness of sin, and the gift of eternal life with God because God loves us - even when we don't respond in kind to God. That is generosity.

So, at UMCg, we seek to share what God has given each of us with others, all as an act of love that we receive from God in Christ Jesus. First, we share our **prayers**. We pray for anyone and any situation. We don't have to be a member of this church or any church to share in prayer. Second, we share our **presence**. This is the hard one - we give of our time for worship, service, caring for others so that others can experience joy, love, worship or have their needs met. Third, we share



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our **gifts**. This can be talent and treasure to supply the needs of the church so we can keep working on all of this together. Next, we share **service** - so many of these point to serving others. United Methodists are known for their service - we help as much as we can wherever there is need all around this world. In fact, the US government and Red Cross often consult with our United Methodist Committee on Relief to best provide aid in many situations. We also share our **witness**. We are not willing to keep our church family and our mission to ourselves, we want others to share in it with us, because we know when it comes to love of family there is more to go around, more chairs at the table, more sign-ups for service, more space in our pews, more than enough Jesus to go around.

I am proud to say that while we sometimes suffer from a bit of scarcity mindset, by and large at UMCG we are a generous church, comprised of incredibly generous people, because we know how generous God is to us in Christ Jesus. So, let's keep sharing all that we have and all that we offer with generous and glad hearts. Amen.