

Pastor Roy's sermon from November 11, 2018

Generosity.

Each person we meet, we tend to either respect, ignore, or fear. We will not be generous with those we ignore or would rather ignore. What turned the church into a movement was that Jesus' followers found in their faith the capacity to be generous in many ways toward those others feared and ignored. It wasn't, I believe, as much because they were nice people but because they had been touched by profound hope and grace. The Grace of God.

What is generosity? Is it not to give to another with joy, gratitude, abundance, and freedom?

Doesn't it make sense that if we give with open hands out of a sense of joy, gratitude, and freedom that those qualities will increase in us and around us?

But what if we are taken advantage of? It could be argued, and some do, that the widow giving two copper coins to the temple, and the well-off people who ran it, was being taken advantage of. They should have been giving to her in the form of alms.

We hate the thought of being taken advantage of. We will go to great lengths to make sure any cause toward which we contribute is an authentic need and that the gift is well used. If we give and then learn that the money was redirected toward an unworthy cause, we feel guilty and irresponsible. The joy of our giving is lost even though our intention was good.

I believe today's lessons do not end begin and end with money. The widow from Zarephath sacrificially gives of her oil, flour, and energy to provide bread for Elijah. She is willing to cast her lot with the poor prophet from Israel. If he dies, she and her son dies. The widow giving two copper coins supports the place where she meets God, the place where others meet God.

And Jesus notices her. He lifts her up as an example of faithful giving. Abundant generosity. He doesn't go and interview her and make sure she has the right attitude. I always imagine she has a very serious face, but maybe she was smiling! Think about your favorite causes. When you give and when this congregation supports various ministries, you smile, at least inwardly because you know your giving is needed and will accomplish good. Those without resources will have opportunity.

But even beyond good causes, is it possible to live our lives with generosity? That each decision we make, each moment of work, or reflection, or celebration, or even grief is. . .a chance to show love, to experience grace.

I don't know about you, but I confess that not every moment for me is a moment of grace. I worry. I forget to be grateful. I get grabby with what I want to accomplish and get frustrated when I feel failure. I neglect the relationships around me. Not that I don't try. But sometimes I can try so hard that the grace of God is turned into an effort on my part. And I say this because I'm guessing you do the same.

It is the human experience from which we need to keep turning back to God. Back to the generous love of Christ acting in the world today even as Christ gave his life for the world so many years ago. The Spirit is inviting us to be mindful of God's free and abundant provision. To experience the grace and mercy of God to us and those we love first hand. Then to place ourselves in the place of the widows and orphans—whoever in our society is without resources. To seize every moment to offer ourselves in love for those around us—as we are able.

Today is Veteran's day. Veterans have offered their lives for the good of the common order and the wellbeing of our nation. Many have lost their lives defending those whom they love. Veterans are an example of generosity, often at their own emotional and psychological peril. And also police officers, first responders, paramedics, EMTs, and fire fighters who do the same. May we take notice of their courage and willingness to serve generously.

We sit at the feet of Jesus, we receive God's grace. Courage be with you as you take notice and care for the forgotten and despised. Amen.