



1 Timothy 6:6-19; Psalm 146; Luke 16:19-31

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Who modeled generosity to you?

A generous heart is a heart shaped by the love of God. It's God's love for the world, that divine affinity and unity with all created things which informs God's movement towards the world, the Trinitarian outreach of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In that outreach, God shapes the world. By pondering that movement, we can easily see God's compassion and mercy, God's healing grace at work. When seen, heard and touched by God's grace we see, hear and touch others with serving hands. Generosity, compassion and service go hand in hand. I see much of that happening in our congregation: in your acts of service, in your sharing of time, energy and resources, you're offering empathy and demonstrating generosity. All of this is countercultural.

- How do we live faithfully and compassionately in a world driven by wealth and the pursuit of it?
- How much is enough?
- How do we learn to be content with what we have?

Love of money and the comfort and affluence that money can procure is not new.

Ancient prophets spoke words of love on behalf of God. But God also instructed them to challenge the people of Israel (and us by extension) to be better, to elevate ourselves, to show kindness. The prophet Amos especially relates God's disturbing warning: "Woe to the complacent!" (6:1) Amos berates the wealthy whose only focus is their own comfort and enjoyment. They have obtained all the luxury they could have imagined and ignore the fact that things are falling apart around them, and people are suffering.

It is my opinion that when we live in fear, greed finds an open door to sneak in and overpower us. When we become overly concerned with ourselves it's hard to consider how badly others might be faring. Fear generates greed. Those who want to become rich run the risk of becoming obsessed with possessions and positions. Paul calls for contentment that generates godliness (1 Tim 6:6).

Paul acknowledges that desire for money and what money can purchase is addictive and deceptive. It really does lure one away from true faith, and one's very self is "pierced" by many "pains" (1 Tim 6:10).

Money offers not only purchasing power but also a sense of security and control. It becomes easy to crave the respect and status that money can offer. Wealth can intoxicate one's mind to the point of becoming arrogant and feeling above others, manipulating conversations, controlling people's choices and keeping people captive. How can we wield that

power in a way that does not corrupt us? What can we do to resist temptation and remain faithful?

Paul recognizes that some people in the congregation may already be rich. He warns them in turn not to be haughty but rather set their hopes on God and see how much they can use their wealth to experiment with generosity and help others (1 Tim 6:17). God gives us what we need richly.

The depth of joy that the spiritual gift of generosity can give us is the “life that really is life” (1 Tim 6:19).

And that is...

- the presence of Love in human interactions,
- the simplicity of heart in honoring human dignity,
- words of encouragement in moments of grief,
- deeds of kindness that value human life.

Perhaps this is what we can pick up from Jesus’ apocalyptic parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16). As Jesus spins his tale, he describes the rich man's overabundance and Lazarus’ dreadful misery. When Lazarus died, he was welcomed in Father Abraham’ lap like while the rich man received all that he had ever given: nothing but grief.

The tables have turned. Lazarus, who in life was invisible and lived in appalling conditions, is now blessed and receives hospitality: he is loved and consoled. Things don’t go too well for the rich man. In life, his indifference and self absorption had dug the chasm separating him from anyone

beneath his consideration. He had not crossed over into the zone of compassion. Now, he notices Lazarus as a potential servant from whom he could benefit. The closest the pitiable man ever got to expressing compassion came when he begged for a message to his brothers. Abraham's response: the Holy Scriptures have enough encouraging messages.

Paul admonishes, "Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called." Paul is not talking about a future place in the bosom of Abraham. He is talking of today. Today, hear God's voice, and do not harden your heart (Hebrews 3:7-19).

We spoke about the memory of faith last week, particularly how we recognize God at work in our present reality by recalling to mind God's ways of faithfulness to us in the past. That's an exercise we are invited to do often: to keep in mind God's mercy toward us, how God has demonstrated loving-kindness, compassion and healing. Thus, let us consider:

- Do you remember that moment in this past year when you were moved to tears in worship?
- Do you remember that time when you volunteered on a service project and you discovered that your heart was enriched the most even though you came to serve?
- Do you remember when heartache struck and your faith community rallied around you with not just support but food and tears of solidarity?

- Do you remember when you first heard and took to heart the message of the gospel and how it brought you heart-bursting joy?
- Do you remember seeing the children gathered for the children's message, how they sang words of praise, and how it bolstered your own faith?
- Do you remember how your life has changed through your church, and how you change the lives of others through your church? How beautiful it is that brothers and sisters live together and gather to give God the glory?
- Don't you remember how much ministry happened this past year because of your generosity?

Do not underestimate what you can give in terms of money, time and energy. There is no act of generosity that is too small or insignificant. Unless people tell you, you'll never know the impact of even a small act of kindness. God can see and multiply what we consider too small to make any difference at all (see John 6:9).

What's our attitude towards money? One doesn't have to be rich to love money: one's wallet size does not necessarily dictate one's approach to money.

Trust in the Lord who can give richly. Behold the Beauty of the Lord and lead a godly life. Amen.