



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for February 13, 2022
“Fruitfulness: A Bountiful Harvest”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: II Corinthians 9:6-11

A Scripture for the Whole of Life

You know Yogi Berra as the great catcher and manager of the New York Yankees. He is also the king of the malapropism. One of his most famous is, *“It’s like deja-vu all over again.”*

You ever feel that way? You might feel that today as we look at a passage of scripture I preached a couple of years ago during our annual stewardship campaign. The scripture is II Corinthians 9:6-11 where Paul writes about *“whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”* It’s a famous one when talking about money.

Paul uses that well-known proverb of his day to encourage the Corinthians about an offering he was taking for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

In planning our present sermon series on fruitfulness, I kept coming back to it. It seemed to speak not just to money, but to the whole of life. We’ll soon find that to be the case. Let’s hear then this great passage, II Corinthians 9:6-11.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

*“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”*

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

The Joy of Giving

A recent survey conducted by the staff of *Aspire* magazine discovered quite a few personal benefits of being generous. They found that high-generosity people:

- Are satisfied with their life compared to low-generosity folks.
- Are almost three times as likely to be *“very happy”* compared with low-generosity people.

- Are almost three times as likely to have a “*very meaningful*” life.
- Are more likely to believe that other people are inherently good.
- Are closer to people they know than those who are less generous.
- Are more satisfied with their careers, comfortable with what they have, and overall feel healthier when compared with low-generosity people.

How interesting.

It’s okay for us to talk about money at times other than during our stewardship campaign. Jesus talked about money all the time. He knew that generosity has a way of adding a certain joy to life that’s not found otherwise.

Generosity frees us from the hold of things and puts us to focusing upon God and other people. I want to encourage you about such things. Give generosity a try. You’ll be glad you did. There is joy in giving.

Generous in the Whole of Life

All that being said, let’s agree that we can be generous in more ways than with our money. Simply giving money isn’t all there is to being generous. In fact, it can sometimes be an easy out. Today, we will be looking at what it means to be generous in the whole of life. Being well-invested and well-engaged in the whole of life leads to the sort of fruitfulness God desires for our lives.

As Paul encouraged the Corinthians to take an offering for the saints in Jerusalem, he left it to his readers to consider what to do. “*You should give what you have decided in your heart to give,*” he said.

I read that to be just as applicable to being generous in other things as it is to being generous with money. It comes to us to consider how we are “*spending*” our lives. Ask yourself, are you seizing the opportunities around you to offer yourself to others, or are you simply “*walking on the other side?*”

That’s exactly what the priest did upon seeing the man who had been beaten and robbed on the Jericho Road in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

How many times have you “*walked on the other side of the road*” to dodge what you know in your heart is a real need? The Pandemic has given us a ready excuse to dodge what we know we should do. All of us have examples of missed opportunities. For many, it has been all too comfortable to remain behind closed doors.

The Way of God’s Kingdom

The way of God’s Kingdom is not in holding back but in letting go. It’s not about sowing sparingly but sowing generously.

Our Wednesday Night Men’s Small Group is studying a book written by Larry Stoess called, *Think Red*. Yes, he’s the same Larry Stoess, who was Youth Minister here quite a few years ago and is now the Pastor of the Church of the Promise in Portland.

Larry shares that one of the values that drives his church is radical generosity. In talking about that radical generosity Larry is quick to point out the abundance God offers in comparison to the scarcity of this world.

He says, *"I have much to unlearn about the consumerist ways of this world that are based on the myth of scarcity, and even more to learn about the economics of God's super-abundant Kingdom."*

"You can't out give God," he writes, *"but it sure is fun trying."*

Jesus paved the way when it comes to such things. Christ gave and gave again, even to the point of giving his own life. Jesus poured himself into people. He was generous in every way, and he wants nothing more than for us to do the same. This is the Kingdom way.

Paul ties all of this to grace. God's grace is ever abundant. In fact, it abounds in every way. Hear what Paul says in II Corinthians 9:8, *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."*

What Then Does Generosity Look Like?

What then does generosity look like? Above all things, it will resemble God's generosity. God has enriched our lives to no end and because of that we are inspired to be generous as well.

God's grace has been showered upon us. The gift of God's love in Jesus Christ has turned our lives around. God has generously dealt with our lives and wants to do the same in the lives of others.

You and I play a part in that.

What will generosity look like? How about the Fruit of the Spirit?

- *"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"* will characterize our lives and the way we go about relating to others.

What will generosity look like? How about the elements of our membership vows to the church?

- *"Prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness"* are important expressions of God's generosity in our lives.

These things generously offered have the potential to make a profound difference in the world.

You never know you very well may find yourself in the Starbucks line somewhere having had someone pay it forward. That sort of thing has been known to stretch on from one car to another for an entire day.

I like the story of the man traveling along a rural road when he ran out of gas. The man went to a nearby farmhouse to call a service station, but the farmer insisted on taking him there with can in hand, bringing him back, and even staying with him until his car was running again. The grateful man offered the farmer a \$20 bill and the farmer shook his head.

When the man insisted, the farmer replied, "Look, mister, I feel very good about helping you. If I took your money, you'd buy that feeling back from me. And it's not for sale."

The farmer knew what it meant to be generous. No money changed hands, only love and a deep desire to help.

Don't Give Up

Mary Lautensleger, one of our pastors in Western North Carolina, titles our passage for today from II Corinthians 9, *The Sermon on the Amount*. I like that. What “*amount*” of yourself are you ready to invest?

Sure, Paul is talking about money here, but he is also encouraging us about other types of generosity, other ways of being generous that lead to an abundant harvest. As Paul says, “*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.*”

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” (II Corinthians 9:19-11)

So, when it comes to offering yourself generously, don't give up. Let God empower you even more.

Let's be honest, there are times when we feel like packing it in when it comes to living generously.

- The headwinds seem too strong.
- We feel like at best we are only treading water.
- One step forward and two steps back is all too common.
- We may feel out of place. Remember the adage about “*blooming where planted*” holds true.

Paul says, “*Don't grow weary in well-doing, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*” (Galatians 6:9)

Let me encourage you then not to give up. Keep at it when it comes to living generously. Seek to hit the pillow at night with that good sort of tired after having generously given of yourself the whole day long.

Sow generously and God will bring fruitfulness to your life and an abundant harvest to his Kingdom.