



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for February 20, 2022
“Fruitfulness: Gleaning”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Deuteronomy 24:19-22

Generosity—A Reoccurring Theme

Last week we talked a great deal about being generous in the whole of life. We talked about being generous in more ways than with money.

Paul challenged us to keep in mind that those who “*sow sparingly will also reap sparingly.*” Conversely, he reminded us that those who “*sow generously will also reap generously.*” He writes about that in II Corinthians 9:6-11.

What we talk about today hits at much the same theme. We will be considering one of the laws found in the Old Testament law. That law has to do with the practice of gleaning. There are two scriptures of note in the Old Testament—one in Leviticus 19:9-10, and the other from Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

Of course, the book of Ruth talks about gleaning. If you are familiar with the story of Ruth you will remember that she gleaned the field of Boaz, who later would become her future husband.

In talking about gleaning, we will learn yet again that generosity is an outgrowth of God’s abundance and a reflection of the sort of holy living he desires for our lives. Let’s hear then this passage from Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

A Problem with Birds

At the church I served in Owensboro years ago, we had a bird problem. I mean a bird problem. We had flocks of birds hanging around to the point that they became a nuisance, a dirty nuisance, if you know what I mean.

What was happening was that in the dead of winter the birds would fly over to Owensboro Grain and eat the corn that had been spilled around the giant silos there. They would then fly to the huge tower that stood over one of the entrances to our sanctuary. Those birds made a tremendous mess at the very place the people entered the Sanctuary.

We even investigated a netting that would keep them from roosting, but it cost over \$100,000. In my mind that was a non-starter. I told them I would be more than happy to go up there and beat a pie plate before we spent \$100,000.

What those birds did at Owensboro Grain was glean the leftover corn.

Gleaning—A Command of the Lord

For the Hebrews, gleaning was very much a commandment of the Lord. It was viewed as a matter of benevolence, an expression of holiness, and a wonderful way to be generous. Farmers were instructed to leave a portion of their harvest for *“the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow.”* Those who were on the margins of society, economically and otherwise, were encouraged to gather what was left.

By offering a portion of their harvest, the farmers were reminded of the days when their ancestors were *“slaves in Egypt.”* Remembering the past is always instructive. The great quote from George Santayana, *“Those who cannot remember their past are condemned to repeat it,”* rings true.

Cutting Corners

The purpose of leaving a portion of a field unharvested was so the poor would have something to eat. Strictly speaking, farmers were to leave the edges of their fields, and particularly the corners, for the poor to gather as they walked by.

You have heard the expression, *“cutting corners.”* You have probably used it yourself. You may have even found yourself doing just that. *“Cutting corners”* usually means cutting out things in order to reach a goal as cheaply and easily as possible. Corporations will do that to temporarily drive-up profits.

Let's turn that just a bit to consider the ways you *“cut corners”* when it comes to supporting the needs of others. During the day when the law was written to *“cut corners”* meant there wouldn't be anything left for those who needed it.

What about You?

What about you? How are you providing room on the margins for the support of those in need? And if not the margins, then what ways you have re-oriented your life to where support for those in need is central to who you are and what you're doing?

The answer to these questions depends in large degree on what you think about God and how you have experienced his benevolence. We serve a benevolent God, and he wants us to be benevolent as well. That message comes through loud and clear in both the Old and New Testaments.

Benevolence is tied to God's love, a love that is no more clearly stated than in Jesus Christ. We love because he first loves us. We seek to support our neighbors because he supports us first.

What Will It Be—Generosity or Scarcity?

Just as we talked last week, where is your focus? Is it on the generosity and fruitfulness of God's abundance or the scarcity and greed of this world? Paul encourages about this when he writes in Ephesians 3:20, *“Now to him who is able to do abundantly more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*

God's Kingdom is founded upon the abundance of his mercy and grace. The world would have us think that there's not enough, so we tend to hold on to all we can. Some even hoard to the point of illness. With most, enough is never enough.

Consider the story Jesus tells in Luke 12 about the rich man whose harvest was so big that he tore down his barns and built bigger ones, all of this so he could *"eat, drink, and be merry."* Jesus is clear at this point, stockpiling so you can *"eat, drink, and be merry"* is not a way of life that brings us closer to God, much less to others. In the end, such a lifestyle will leave us unfulfilled and still wanting.

Remember yet again what Paul said, *"Those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly, but those who sow generously will reap generously."* (II Corinthians 9:6)

The story is told of a zookeeper who was charged with looking out for the monkeys. One day he placed bits of fruit in a plastic container with a narrow opening. The opening was just big enough for the monkey to get his hand in. If he grabbed the fruit and tried to get his hand out, he was prevented from doing so by the narrow opening. It was only when the monkey spilled out the contents to share with the other monkeys that he was able to enjoy some himself.

How Are Others Benefitting from You?

Let's ask the questions again, when it comes to your life what margins, if not corners, are being made available to others so they might benefit? How is the abundance God has heaped upon your life being translated into support for others? I am not just talking about money here.

You have so much to offer. Don't ever minimize the effect of offering your talents to support of others. What are your strengths and how might they be employed in helping your neighbor?

The answer to that question might be as simple as preparing a hot meal, offering a listening ear, or hammering a few nails. It might include tutoring someone in math or helping them to read. It might mean helping with someone's taxes or watching their kids. It very well might mean sending a card or placing a telephone call. You might even find yourself cutting someone's grass or raking their leaves.

When it comes to the broader community, you very well may want to volunteer at a local mission. I would be glad to talk with you further about any number of great opportunities that abound in this community.

Scouts, I am tickled that every year you guys work hard to collect food for our local food bank. The possibilities are endless. There are all sorts of ways to offer yourself in service to others. Rest assured that when you do, God will multiple what you offer many-fold.

Margins Available and Corners Uncut

I love the story told of rescue workers in a famine-stricken area who were handing out glasses of milk to some half-starved orphans. One was a little boy who had several brothers and sisters and was used to dividing his food among them. The little boy asked the worker who gave him his milk, *"How far down do you want me to drink?"* Now that's thinking about others.

Of course, the worker said, *"All the way down, all the way down."*

The problem is that there are way too many of us drinking from glasses that are way too big, at the expense of others in need.

We'd do well to leave our margins available and our corners uncut. By so doing, we'll be so much more fruitful and certainly more fulfilled.

Leaving Enough for Others

I have noticed that in polite company we are careful about taking the last roll in the basket, the last spoonful in the serving dish, and the last cut of meat. We do that because there may be someone else who might want it. We will at least ask if someone wants it before we take it.

I have noticed that same thing with our donuts around here. There is almost always one donut left.

It is always good to leave a little for others. When we do, I am of the mind that we will soon be leaving a lot more. That's the way it is with generosity.

Filling your plate is not all it is cracked up to be. Leaving enough for others is. That's the way of gleaning. That's the way of generosity. And that's the way of a fruitful life.