

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"The Power of Generosity"  
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It's hard to talk about generosity. It's something more seen and experienced than verbalized. It's also something that makes people awkward. Oh no, he's going to talk about money again, even though you know I've only been here three Sundays and can't have ever talked about it before.

But generosity is more than a sermon on money. It is a heart set. Some people just give and give. You can tell that about them in their homes, in their cards and letters, even in their emails, if they do such a thing. Generosity can't be covered up, and neither can the opposite of it be covered up.

My father was generous. He would give me spending money when I came home from university. When I married he gave my new wife some spending money just for herself. But it wasn't only in the money, it was also in supporting me in my choice of education. He helped me pursue education that undergirded ministry when he knew I would do better in engineering or sciences of some kind. He helped me anyway. And when he died my family and even my mother found out that he had helped a foreigner get his accounting degree, helped another person pay the rent, besides helping prisoners read and also be a sponsor for AA. Dad used to take me to the grocery store and say, "Whatever you want, put it in the cart." And he meant it. I'd go with mom and she would have clipped the coupons and she was telling me mostly what I couldn't have. But Dad was amazing.

Generosity begins with one's time, just as much or more than money. Generosity is an attitude which one can cultivate or shun. No one sets out in life saying when I grow up I want to be a skinflint or a tight wad. These attitudes just naturally come upon us as we progress through life. Many of us have had to make do with very little. Some of us are afraid that if we give, we will have nothing left. But those who give have enough. It's strange that the stories of greatest generosity are those which involve the poorest people. For example, I've heard many instances of generosity from Africa where a family that has nothing gives their last animal or their last food to a stranger, in order to show hospitality.

So giving does not have to do with how much we have, it has to do with the choices we choose, in our time, in our money, in our giving of ourselves away to others. How do you give away of yourself to others? How can you choose to do so in new and creative ways? Because Jesus in the gospel commends our meditating upon the fact that it is more important to be rich toward God than in any other way. This does not condemn those with money. All of us will give an account one day to the One who holds all the final accounts. In that way, God is very much an accountant, and according to the Scriptures, he keeps books, so we could say He is a bookkeeper as well.

The main book that we need to be in, is the Book of Life, where we have given ourselves to Him freely and fully. Every week we examine a new aspect of what it means to have given ourselves to God, in our lifestyles, in our words, in our work and in our recreation. To be in God's book, we simply acknowledge our sin, our deviation from God's norm, and say that we will turn from that deviation back to God through Jesus Christ. And when we say that in our hearts a new relationship with God comes about and we begin to experience a bit of heaven on earth, that living and vital relationship between the Creator and ourselves. Without that relationship, all we have is head knowledge about God, and what we need to know most of all is that we are his and he is ours. Then within the parameter of that relationship, we can talk about greed, generosity, giving, withholding, helping, serving, dysfunction, you name it. Because once that relationship with God is clear, and there has been a willing giving of one's heart to Jesus Christ, then we met with the One who has given the most. We will never out-give the Giver of Life.

One of God's greatest attributes is his generosity. He gave us life. We said as human beings, "No" to his way. He called a people to himself. They said "No" to his way. Finally, He sent His Son, and the people of that time said "No" and tortured him to death. But He said "Yes" when Jesus was raised back to life, and our sins were cancelled when we say "yes" to his "Yes."

So Paul agrees with the resurrection and says that we have been raised with Christ in Colossians 3:1, and that we are to set our minds on things above, spiritual things. In other words, we need to agree with God in putting to death that which is in rebellion to God within us, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. The inherent

selfishness of humanity comes to the fore quite easily. The idolatry is the addictive self-devotion in one's sexuality, one's thought life, one's personal ambition over and against God's call and priorities.

That's why when Jesus hears someone in the crowd asking him to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him, he doesn't address the short term question of inheritance laws. Clearly he could've addressed the injustice this person was experiencing. Instead, he chose to address the narcissism of the day, the me-generation. Something like what the movie *Finding Nemo* portrayed the seagulls like, all they said all day long was "Mine. Mine. Mine."

He goes to the heart of that matter and says it doesn't matter how many thousand pounds of stuff you own. Of course it does matter if you are a professional mover. But in God's eyes, he wants people to agree with his generosity and give so that people will see his love who currently don't believe he even exists or that he is the kind of God that someone would like to get to know.

In the particular year Jesus was teaching, there happened to be a very good market for grain, maybe wheat or barley or rye. And owning large amounts of that crop was like money in the bank. But the problem was that the crop was so good that there wasn't enough storage space for it, so a man decided to build his own storage facility, just as many today are building these mini-storage unit depots. And he was right, it was the right financial thing to do. He built the storage facilities and his grain was safe, and he was rich beyond his wildest dreams. Unfortunately, his hard work and his health were over at about the same time. And so all those he could have loved, he could have given to, he could have spent time with, were neglected and his whole life was over before he knew it.

There's the twist in the story that Jesus tells. He did well for himself, and that was his problem.

Are we that man? Are we thinking mainly or only about ourselves? I have no idea what the church finances are currently and so I can't speak to what you give in the offering plate. I know it's about \$4000 a year just to keep the lights on, let alone heat and supplies. But this is not about the church organization, or about what you put in the plate.

This is more about your attitude, my attitude to giving. How can we be richer toward God? During these summer days, I hope you have time to meditate on these things? What will you choose this Fall as your time commitments, as your financial commitments, as your heart commitments?

We all only have so much time. I heard on the radio yesterday the broadcaster saying how the week went as if it were only a few minutes. I was with a couple this weekend who said, "Where did that sixty years go?"

Before you know it, your life is behind you and you wonder where it has gone. But meanwhile, we live day to day and moment to moment and whether we are in the first part of life growing up, or young adulthood, or middle age or senior years, the question is the same. How will we give away of our time?

How will we waste our time? Time wasting was a terrible sin growing up. Now I realize that we waste time no matter what we do. As we read in Ecclesiastes, all is a chasing after wind, vanity, superlative vanity. Our character is what will last. And people will see whether we have chosen to reflect our Creator rather than the One who lies and cheats and steals.

But when we waste our time in God's direction, with his voice in our ears, we have a powerful taste of life, the life that goes on beyond our physical lives, the life that changes generations.

Let us pray.