

“Generosity”

Matthews 22:15-22

A Sermon from the First Pew of
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL

October 18, 2020

Matt Matthews

This is a sermon about generosity.

Jesus makes clear that God is generous. God is a God not of grace; God is a God of *amazing grace*. God's justice, God's mercy, God's kindness, God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. God is a generous God.

Remember that parable of the workers (Mt 21ff)? The master hired some workers early in the day; the master agreed to pay them a fair day's wage. The master hired some late in the day. At the end of the day he paid all of the workers the same day's wage. Those who heard this parable complained to Jesus, saying it was unfair that those hired at the end of the day got paid the same as those hired earlier. Their problem is not the master's fairness: all workers were paid a fair wage. Their problem was that the men hired at the end of the day got paid the same thing as those hired at the beginning of the day. Their problem with this parable was the master's generosity.

Lots of people, then and now, have trouble with God's generosity. Jonah was offended that God forgave the people of Ninevah. Jonah thought the Ninevites deserved God's wrath; God, instead, was generous.

Some people don't think it's fair that the rain falls on the bad *and* the good; the sun shines on the just *and* the unjust.

The father in the parable of the lost (or prodigal) son forgives and welcomes the son back home even though he had wasted his father's money. He kills the fatted calf. He gives the boy a ring, a robe, a bath, and a party. Jesus makes clear that God is the God who rejoices. God is the God who throws the party.

In the parable we often call The Parable of the Good Samaritan, the outsider breaks all the laws and norms of the day; he breaks the barriers posed by class, religion, national origin. This foreigner/Samaritan helps the wounded local. The Pharisee and the Levite pass by on the other side, leaving the wounded man to suffer and probably to die. But the Samaritan saves him. The outsider-Samaritan treats the wounded man like a neighbor. *Treat your neighbor with generosity*, is Jesus' point, *and broaden your definition of who your neighbor is*.

These and countless other stories from scripture underscore the generosity of God.

Fred Craddock writes that “the generosity of God quite often cuts across our calculations of who deserves what.” ([Preaching the Common Lectionary](#), Abington.) But whether we like it or not, God is a generous God.

And what about today's parable? The Pharisees plotting to entrap Jesus ask him whether or not it's right to pay taxes to Caesar. In this famous scene, Jesus asks to see a coin. He holds up the coin. “Whose image is on this coin?” he asked. “The emperor's,” they say, to which Jesus famously replies, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Render unto God, the things that are God's.”

The implication of this text is that the emperor gets a percentage of our money, God's gets our whole life: our talents, our money, our time, our energy, our devotion, our vocation, our truest, deepest selves.

The earth is the Lord's, says the Psalmist. The world's vast bounty was created by and redeemed by God. And God shares a tiny sliver of the cosmos with us—to enjoy, to use, and to take care of. As God is generous, we are invited to follow suit. We are called to be generous with that which God has entrusted to our care.

* * *

The church for me has always been a place where the people of God come together to practice being generous. We grow in our capacity to love. We practice being hospitable. Because not everyone thinks the same way, we learn to exercise mutual forbearance. You say tomaato; I say tomauto. He likes Sinatra, she likes The Beach Boys. The church is a place we come to worship, to learn, to serve, to grow. The church is a crucible, a melting pot, a sanctuary, a safe port in the storm, a launch pad. The church is a sacred gift from a generous God.

Over the decades people met each other on the campus of the University of Illinois. They went to dances sponsored by McKinley Presbyterian Church. Presby Hall was a meeting place and a place for growing friendships. They found their future spouses at church dinners there, singing in the choir, attending Bible studies. They met life-long friends. Members of First Pres grew in faith during their college years at McKinley.

This generosity of spirit brought together and nurtured disciples of Jesus who left the University and spent their lives giving away the love they had been given. How cool is that?

I'm so grateful for God's church.

* * *

You remember this story that has long circulated by word of mouth and e-mail. I've probably shared it with you before. It's worth hearing again. It shines light on this conversation about generosity.

A sick little girl needs blood. The doctor notes that her brother has the same blood type. The doctor asks the boy, "Will you give some of your blood to your sister?" After a moment, the boy agrees.

The little boy lies on the hospital gurney giving blood. He watches the bag slowly fill up. He's very quiet. Finally, he asks the nurse, "When am I going to die?"

This little kid thought that giving blood to his big sister would mean that he would have to die. He really thought the doctor would take all of his blood, and that, because of it, his sister would make it and he would not. He thought that and he said yes anyway. He gave anyway.

Is this the kind of godly generosity Jesus expects from us?

* * *

Part of what's in our pocket, we give to the emperor. But everything that's in our heart is meant to be shared with others in the name and to the glory of God.

A M E N .