

Who Taught You Generosity?

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Worship, Grow, Serve: Generosity Appeal

Who have been the models in our lives that have demonstrated generosity of time, talents or money? Generosity is a spiritual gift, but can be learned as well. The widow gave out of a generous heart.

Mark 12: 41-44 He (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

God’s grace to you this day!

Today marks the beginning of our fall generosity appeal. We’ve kept the same name: Worship, Grow, Serve because it is so appropriate. We worship God who blesses us beyond compare: we have breath, life, family, friends, church, freedoms, our health (even if it is not great), medical care, the birds of the sky and the fish of the mountain lakes....God is generous. Here in this place the Holy Spirit helps us grow in faith and love and forgiveness and hope. That same Spirit knits us together as a community bound in love and deep or new friendships. Then we go out to serve people ourselves; more generous in our hearts because we know the origin of our joy, the source of our life. We serve as Jesus asked us to do.

I have one question for this sermon: **Who or what has modeled generosity for you? Who has modeled generosity for you in time, talent or money?**

Near the end of the sermon, I’m going to ask you to turn to a neighbor and reflect together on this question. Think of it as a sermon dialog or sermon conversation.

Who or what has modeled generosity for you?

The widow in today’s Gospel puts in two copper coins. We honestly cannot know her original intent. She might be incredible generous or perhaps she is putting in the required tithe that keeps widows like her, in poverty. But whatever the reason, Jesus notices her and mentions her to the disciples. For our purposes today I’m

going to assume that God has given her a generous heart. For Jesus says, “All the rest contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Please, please don't quit listening right off the bat. I didn't chose this text to make any of us feel intentional shame or guilt. I'm not going to tell us we have to give all our money away. That's the text Pr Deb's gets to preach next weekend. You may laugh, but it's a challenging text and I know she'll have a great message for us.

If we return to the question, “who or what has modeled generosity for you?” then you'll notice I'm asking a learning question.

The truth is, generosity is a spiritual gift. We all have spiritual gifts: hospitality, faith, teaching, mercy and generosity is one of the spiritual gifts God gives to certain people. But not all of us posses that gift. For those of us who don't have this gift, we can learn to be generous.

Here's an example. I had a friend name Sam. (His name is changed to protect the innocent!) Sam worked in the financial industry in Las Vegas and was married to one of the church staff. He was quite the jolly fellow. But more than once when I heard someone from staff say, “Where are we going to get the money for that?” Sam would pip up and say, “Well, I'll just go to work to make more money to give to church!”

That's the spiritual gift of generosity. He loved giving money to the church, to needy people, to worthy causes. He's the kind of guy non-profits loved to have on their boards. That was Sam. I'll bet you've met a Sam in your life.

Are we all Sam? No. But Sam needed the church so that he could practice his spiritual gift and he modeled generosity to me.

Another example. My first two churches were in South Dakota. In rural areas, generosity abounds. Because people need each other. I never ceased to be amazed when one of the ranchers got sick or broke a leg, the phones would start ringing.

“Hey! We're meeting at Johnson place on Tuesday at 8 am because old man Johnson is in the hospital. Bring your 10 row (combine).”

“Yep, ok! I'll be there.”

Those ranchers needed each other to snow plow out the roads, to bring food when the Mrs. was feeling sick, to carpool the kids 15 miles to school. And to bring in the hay or work the crops when there was an emergency. Folks that are just salt of the earth folks, modeling generosity of time to this pretty green young pastor right out of seminary.

Last story is about Donna. Donna is 90 years old and her body is beginning to fail her. But her mind and her love of God is as strong as ever. She isn't able to get around very well, but what she can do, is knit. So day after day, Donna sits in her chair knitting prayer shawls and praying. She prays for her six children and their children. She prays for her friends and people in the community. Donna prays for the politicians in her town. Her church and pastors get prayed for even when she doesn't agree with them – which happens with some regularity. Can you see her? Knits and prays, knits, and prays in her lazy boy chair with the light coming through her bay windows.

Donna models for me generosity of time and spirit.

The widow only put in two coins. But it was the manner in which she gave which mattered. Jesus noticed! 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “God loves a cheerful giver.” If we don't know how to give of our hearts, we can learn it. God doesn't want us to be motivated to give out of shame or guilt. The secret is connecting our giving with our God.

Who or what in your life has modeled generosity to you? Take a moment and chat with some people around you.

Any willing to share?

May all God's people, say, Amen!