

## **“When We Get It Right”**

October 30, 2016

*Discovering Gravity series*

I wanted to say thanks to Dirk Fuller for his witness and the reminder that he offered all of us: generosity is something we learn. Generosity is something we witness in others. It's something we notice. Perhaps it's something we become a part of over time. I needed to hear what Dirk shared - that he learned generosity and faithful giving by watching others. I needed the challenge and conviction that generosity matters.

Over the past few weeks, generosity has been the underlying theme. We started with the reality of financial gravity - and the power of the pull that money and stuff can have over us. Then we moved to breaking free - not simply receiving from God, but participating in God's work in the world.

Last week, we were challenged to consider what we're connected to - to what are we tethered - more to the stuff of this life or to God who offers us eternal life?

During all of that time, we've been encouraged to pray and consider how we want to be generous with our money, time, and talents. Today we have an opportunity to offer our Faith Commitments. We make a commitment to pray, be present in worship, study, and fellowship, offer our financial gifts, serve God and others, and witness to the faith we claim.

Friends, these are not small commitments. Whenever we do this together, we grow in grace. Tom Berlin says, “We simply will never grow in the love of Christ unless we allow God to form a generous spirit within us.” Letting God in when it comes to generosity is vital to our spiritual growth.

When Jesus began teaching people about the Kingdom of God, he was bringing people together. He wasn't trying to form a new nation that had physical boundaries. He wasn't asking people to be a part of something based on who they were or where they came from. Jesus was welcoming people into a Kingdom that would extend over every national boundary and unite people across time.

Jesus didn't teach people to make a fortune or gain power over others in this life in order to have a false sense of security for what was to come. He taught his followers to be generous with love, forgiveness, and kindness. And he taught them to be careful about the unusual gravity of money, wealth, and possessions that would draw them away from God's Kingdom.

He told all kinds of stories to make his point clear. We heard about the younger son who blew all that he had and came home to a loving father. There's a story about a man who had reaped a great harvest and instead of sharing the harvest, he decided to

build a bigger barn to hold it so he could sit back and enjoy it. I talked to my dad this week, and he mentioned the importance of helping neighbors in need – country neighbors who tend to be a few roads over. A generous spirit matters.

Jesus finished the story by reminding everyone that storing up treasures for ourselves doesn't get us anywhere with God. We need to be *rich toward God*. And ultimately, Jesus said that where our treasure is, that's where our heart really is.

Why did Jesus teach us these things? Because he wanted the best for our lives. He wanted us to live with the knowledge that we were already in the kingdom of heaven. We don't have to fear death because the Kingdom of God isn't some place some far-off land to which we fly away someday.

The Kingdom of God is right here and right now! It's whenever we do the will of God and align our lives with God's purposes. We have no fear of death because Jesus' offer of salvation, when we receive and experience it for the gift that it is, secures our lives to the life and care of God.

We can trust God. Jesus told us to live a life generous in every way so that we would have assurance of our salvation, confidence that we would spend eternity with God, and a sense of significance and goodness in the life we live here and now.

Jesus taught his followers to be generous because he wanted you and me to bless others. It's not just about wanting the best for us; it's also about being a blessing. Rather than gather more for ourselves, he wanted us to be a witness and a launch pad for other people. We heard Dirk say that in how his parents and grandparents were a launch pad for him.

Take a look at this video: **SHOW "THE BLOB"**

Some of you may have had this experience before at a camp. This big, inflated raft-looking pillow thing is called the "blob." One person sits on the end of the blob, and it's not that much fun until a second person jumps off the top. When the second person lands in the blob, the first person is catapulted forward. Everyone is enjoying launching and being launched.

But watch this young guy. He gets the concept, but you can tell he's a little fearful. Perhaps it's a little high. He's hesitant to jump. And maybe we feel that way sometimes when it comes to generosity. He gets it, but he doesn't want to take the risk.

Look at the others. They're jumping off. They're launching others. And then soon enough, they're getting launched themselves. Everyone is having a good time. But this guy is still unsure.

Then finally, reluctantly, he takes the risk. He jumps and launches someone else. Then he gets to a place where he is launched into the air. Look at his face. That expression is much better than when he was hesitating.

When we're generous, we bless people. When we're generous as a church, we bless others. We launch others. That's what we want to do. That's why we talk about giving openly. That's why we talk about generosity.

Consider one ministry in this church that has blessed you. Worship services, Bible study, mission trips, choir, Vacation Bible School, prayer groups, Praise Team, Grief Share, Youth Group, serving at MAP or Supper House, Sunday School, receiving a meal from our Soup Pot - all of these are supported by our gifts of money, time, and talent.

Now think of that same list along with other ministries that have blessed others. It's incredible! And our teams and committees like Trustees, Finance, and Staff-Parish help us to be able to offer opportunities in our congregation and community by caring for our physical space, overseeing our budget, and doing the work of ensuring that we have staff.

As a pastor, I have the privilege of hearing from people who are blessed by this congregation. That's why Jesus calls us to be generous and bless others. Jesus told a one parable about a dishonest steward that's somewhat confusing, but his words at the end are powerful: "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"

The ministries that we are a part of and the people who are blessed are the true riches of life. We talk about generosity and about overcoming our human tendency to get more for ourselves when we should be sharing with others because Jesus warned us about money, wealth, and possessions: "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." It's not money, but the love of money that is the root of evil.

But when we get it right, God can be trusted when it comes to our finances. That doesn't mean that we don't care or that we give up. It means that we bring our finances under God's control. Our finances and faith go together.

When we get it right, we know the difference between needs and wants. We find freedom from the pull of more and better and newer stuff.

When we get it right, we can pray for God to help us be content with what we have. I thought of Virginia Deephouse when I thought about contentment. At 100 years old, Virginia was quick to give thanks for God's goodness in her life.

When we get it right, we see ourselves as stewards of God's gifts. We find joy in giving and see our giving as an investment in what God is doing.

St. Francis de Sales, a Catholic priest and bishop in the 16<sup>th</sup> century offered a great image for us as we grow in our devotion to God. When we first experience God's

grace, we're like an ostrich (SHOW PIC). An ostrich can run, but can't fly. If we simply receive from God, but don't respond with devotion, we'll always be looking to get more from God. We'll never get off of the ground.

If we respond with occasional acts of kindness, if we give sometimes, then de Sales says, we're like a chicken (SHOW PIC). If you've ever seen a chicken try to move fast, you know that they can't fly a long way. They're fairly clumsy and limited in flight. They're fly for a little bit, but not long. For us, there's still that pull of getting more instead of giving.

What might be the bird that describes a fully-devoted follower of Jesus? The eagle (SHOW PIC). You've seen them - soaring and majestic and awe-inspiring! This longing to serve God begins with God's grace, but continues with a life dedicated to offering everything to God.

Friends, I think that we truly do want to fly. We want to be faithful stewards who can be trusted. But I know that I need God's help. We need God's help to be faithful with our time, our talents, and our resources.

Some of us have already sent in Faith Commitments. Some of us have them today. All of us have an opportunity to bring them to God in prayer and ask God's help as we carry them out.

We received glow sticks today. I'd ask you to carefully crack them so that the light will shine. As we sing, you're invited to come forward, place the glow stick in a vase as reminder that though we make these commitments as individuals and families, we also make them together as a community of faith. We'll see our light come together with others' lights to be brighter.

This is our witness to love God, love each other, and let our light shine as a witness to God's grace in our lives.

Thanks be to God! Amen.