

2023-09-17 Matthew 19:19 Generosity Here and Now

By The Reverend Cheryl Kester-Schmidt

These past five weeks we have heard the Why, the Who, the Where, The How and today we learn the Here and Now of generosity. Next week we bring our commitment cards and Time and Talent sheets we have prayed over these last few weeks.

How do we live generous lives, Here and Now? The title of this session was originally called "When Pigs Fly" – a humorous image to convey that nothing is impossible with God. We intentionally discover the joy of knowing that "With God, all things are possible!" It is a solid confidence that comes from trusting God and living God's Story of generosity every day in our homes and congregation.

How do we take God's stories to heart? How do we live a life of generosity and how do we serve others, here and now? It is a bit overwhelming. As challenging as this may seem, nothing is impossible with God. We are part of a faith community of all

generations. We care for one another as well as others as we journey together into a new way of being and living.

People in Jesus time were taught if they kept all the rules of their faith perfectly, and if they accumulated enough wealth, they would enjoy a secure and happy life and win favor with God. Those who were poor were believed to be cursed by God. The rich man in our story recognizes there must be more to life than all his accumulations and asks how to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' answer is an illustration emphasizing the impossibility of a "camel going through the eye of a needle." We might say, "When pigs fly."

Jesus was not asking the rich man, or us, to simply get rid of all our possessions and live a life of poverty. Instead Jesus calls each of us into a life of discipleship and relationship with Him. As a follower of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven and an abundant life, here and now, come from sharing our wealth, our possessions and serving others. We are not owners but rather stewards of all God created.

"The first shall be last and the last shall be first" is a reversal of what the rich man believed in God's story. And the opposite message surrounding us in our 24/7/365 culture today.

We have come full circle in learning what stewardship and generosity is about. As we considered in The Who of Week 1, we ask once more. "Do money and things buy happiness? Do our possessions define us or possess us?"

With our fresh perspective on generosity, we have an opportunity to begin a new and abundant life in Christ – *"If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together, and spilling over into your lap"*
(Luke:38 CEV)

God asks us all to "let go" of our worldly stuff and follow Jesus into a new and abundant life of service and generosity. To become households overflowing with abundant joy as grateful stewards of all God has given us.

Like the Macedonians who gave beyond their means, the disciples and early Christian households who followed Jesus and

the little boy who shared his lunch, we, too, are called to not hang on to our wealth or to our stuff – we are to share and be generous, even when it seems impossible.

We are not self-made. Our wealth is not our own and there is no way we can buy God's grace and forgiveness. All we have is a gift from God. Jesus is not saying it is wrong to have money or own things, but it is wrong **not** to share our wealth because it all belongs to God!

To live this lifestyle of generosity is not easy, but with the support of everyone – smallest to tallest - we will find the encouragement to support one another.

Why was Jesus cautious about wealth? For one thing, wealth brings many blessings and challenges. Wealth may also create a sense of false security. We might lord it over others or to think we are better. Wealth has the potential to be an obstacle to having a true understanding of where the true riches in our lives lie: those we love, joy, peace, our faith, God's love and care for us and our relationship with Him.

Having wealth makes us comfortable and happy, God may get pushed to the background of our lives rather than front and center. We may have a habit of turning to God only when we are in need. Being comfortable makes us think we can handle all challenges ourselves.

Ask yourself: when life is positive and happy, do you give God the same amount of your time and attention? Do you thank God daily, for your many blessings? Or does God seem to recede into the background?

Ask yourself: what is the wealth in your life? And more importantly: who is the wealth in your life? Who and what are your riches? Take time to thank God for abundance of wealth in your life (even if you struggle with finances). Name and give thanks for the people who en-“rich” your life with their presence, care and love. Give thanks for the beauty of the earth, for laughter, for children, flowers and anything else that brings you joy, peace or pleasure. My sisters and brothers, we are rich! Nothing is impossible with God. This is indeed, the Good News of Jesus Christ!

