

**Wesley United Methodist Church  
November 22, 2020**

**Developing an Attitude of Gratitude**

**“God Loves a Cheerful Giver”<sup>i</sup>**

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Matthew 25:31-40

The story is told of a couple in church with their 8-year-old son. As the offering plate was being passed, they noticed their son had a quarter in one hand, and a dime in the other. It looked like he was trying to decide which one to put in the offering plate. When the plate came to him, he put in the dime.

After church, his parents asked him how he had decided to put in the dime rather than the quarter. The little boy said, “The preacher told us God loves a cheerful giver and I will be much more cheerful if I put in the dime.”<sup>ii</sup>

Kent Millard tells this story in his book The Gratitude Path. He goes on to point out that we are often like that little boy. We give as little as we can, thinking that we will be happier if we keep more for ourselves. But that really isn't true. We might think it is; especially if we haven't felt the joy of giving cheerfully to something we think is important.

Like many of you, I enjoy giving something special to one of my grandchildren. I do try not to spoil them, but I cheerfully pick up a special book for them, or take them for ice cream, or do something that I know they will enjoy. When it comes to my grandchildren, I know the joy of being a cheerful giver. There are people and activities that we are eager and willing to give to and we derive joy from doing so.

However, it is also true that there are times when I'm not such a cheerful giver. When I feel obligated to do something, then there isn't usually a lot of joy or cheer associated with my giving.

There are multiple reasons why people give to a church or to any organization. Sometimes we give out of obligation. For many church people this comes out of the commitment that we made when we decided to join a church. We promised to support the ministries of the church and so we do. But when we give out of a sense of obligation to give our fair share, it doesn't feel any different than paying our dues to any organization to which we belong.

Sometimes we give out of a sense of guilt. There are organizations that are really good at tugging on our heartstrings. They tell us a story of someone in need and remind us that we have so much more and that for the cost of one cup of coffee a day we can make a difference. And that is true, guilt can be a powerful motivator.

Sometimes, particularly in churches, we give to help meet the budget. It costs x amount for electricity and salaries and other expenses that are necessary so that we can keep our doors open. While this is true, it focuses on the church rather than focusing on God.

Certainly we do have obligations, we want groups that are important to us to be able to meet their budget and those of us with enough or more than enough do need to help those who do not have enough and I don't want to minimize any of this, but I do want to invite us to explore a better way – better for the organizations and important projects we support, but also definitely much better for us – for our mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

I suspect that the little boy in the story I told earlier, gave his dime out of a sense of obligation that he knew his parents expected him to put something in the offering plate. He might have even given his dime thinking he would feel guilty or selfish if he kept it all for himself. He clearly identified that he could be more cheerful about giving away his dime than he could about giving away his quarter.

The reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians contains that phrase that the little boy heard his preacher say, "God loves a cheerful giver." So let's look at that a little more carefully. Times were tough. The people in Jerusalem were in the middle of a famine and people were starving.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and encouraged them to take a collection to help the people in Jerusalem. The people in Corinth had enough. They could afford to help the people in Jerusalem.

However, he didn't want them to give out of obligation or out of guilt. Instead Paul wanted them to focus on the many ways that God had blessed them. He invited them to help others because they were thankful for what they had. He wanted them to share out of their gratitude to God. So, he wrote, "Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God

loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work.” (vv.7-8)

When we have what we need, then we are able to use the rest of what we have to do good works, to help provide for others, to help meet their very real needs. Notice, that Paul doesn't talk about having everything we want. There is a big difference between having what we need and having what we want.

When we focus on what we want, we either become disappointed because we don't have it, and always want more, or we discover we do have everything we thought we wanted but are still missing meaning and purpose. When we have what we need, we can focus on saying thank you to God for the abundance of blessings we have in life. Then we can lead fulfilling and joyful lives as we help others to have the basic necessities they need in order to live.

We have certainly been hearing that as a result of the pandemic, the lines at food pantries are much longer than usual. I read this week that the North Texas Food Bank has given out 600,000 pounds of food for Thanksgiving. They have provided a frozen turkey, 20 pounds of nonperishables, 15 pounds of fresh produce and bags of bread to about 8500 families. For comparison purposes, in previous years, their giveaways averaged about 500 families. This year they are serving more than 8,000 families more than they do under normal circumstances.

The CEO – Trisha Cunningham said, “So many people need it right now, and there is no stigma attached if you're coming through this time. You will be served with dignity and respect.”<sup>iii</sup>

This is so important. It is important not only to feed the people, to meet their basic, and in many cases temporary, need, but equally as important is that they are being treated with dignity and respect. This is important because in our Gospel reading, we heard how Jesus told people that when we welcome a stranger, or clothe someone in need, or visit another, it is as if we are doing it to Jesus. We are to serve other people as if we were serving Christ.

It is easy to serve those whom we know. It is easy to collect food for our neighbor or our friend. It is easy to give something to my grandchildren. But Jesus

reminds us that when we give to another, when we help another, we are doing it to and for him.

The story is told of a student who was concerned about the number of hungry people in the world, the number of homeless people, the number of people facing violence, or dealing with addiction, or mental illness. He complained bitterly to God that even he could have created a better world. God's response to him was, "That's what you are supposed to do". God expects us to help feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and visit the lonely, and protect the vulnerable, and work for justice and equity.

God has provided us with resources, and talents, and privileges, and so much more. When we count those blessings, when we celebrate what we have, we are filled with gratitude and that overflows so that we want others to have that too. When we live with an inner attitude of gratitude, faith, hope, love, and laughter, it has a positive effect on our bodies, our minds, and our souls.

Let us pray:

God of love, God of abundance, we give you thanks for the many blessings we experience in our everyday lives. We pray that you will help us keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open to see these blessings. Help us to develop an attitude of gratitude that helps us to be filled with the joy that comes from being grateful and to show that thanks by giving so that others may have enough. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Millard, Kent "The Gratitude Path". Portions of this sermon are taken from or influenced by chapter 4 of this book.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p.69

<sup>iii</sup> Dennison, Ryan. In Dennison Forum, 11/17/2020