

October 11, 2020

The Walk: Give

The Blessing of Giving
Rev. Meredith Kemp-Pappan

On the porch of my grandmother's house, beside her rattan furniture and potted plants, was also a wooden duck. It was about the size of a real duck, hand-carved and weathered by sun and moisture. Underneath the duck was a false bottom and a small hidden compartment. When I was a poor seminary student, I'd often go to my grandmother's house for a visit and a free meal. On the way out, she'd always say, "be sure to check the duck." And, sure enough, there would be a small bag of quarters—at least \$10 worth—inside. Eventually, the quarters gave way to a \$20 dollar bill. Sometimes she'd even call and say, "i'm not going to be home, but be sure to go by the house and check the duck." And, being usually cash strapped, I'd always obey.

My grandmother died five years ago and I told that story at her funeral. Other people spoke in the service, and each had a similar story of her remarkable and unfailing generosity. Some people at her service knew, but most didn't, that my grandmother had grown up in poverty, and, later in life, raised four kids on her own. With hard work and determination, she built a comfortable life for herself. I wonder if her experience with want inspired her to make sure that others did not go without. And although she was not a church-goer, she embodied the generosity Jesus desires for us.

This week is our fourth in a series based on Rev. Adam Hamilton's book, *The Walk*, and with each step, we re-discover an essential Christian Spiritual discipline. Previously, we have discovered faithful Christian living incorporates regular Worship, study of Scripture, and Service to others. Today we add Generosity to that list. Grateful hearts are generous hearts. Christians are called to be generous with their material wealth and goods. Presbyterians profess that "Christian life is an offering of one's self to God [W-3.0411]. But generosity is more than giving money away; it is a way of life. And to deepen one's faith, one should also examine the role of money in their own lives.

Rev. Hamilton has three principles of generosity that help us discern how we are to be challenged to be (more) generous in our daily lives.

1. Be Grateful for What You Have

Of the three principles of generosity, I find this first principle the most difficult. After all, most of our entire economy is built on wanting "more." As soon as you buy a new smartphone, a newer version hits the market. What's more, manufacturers purposely make their objects not last as long so that you will want to buy the newer-and-better version. People that are happy with what

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they have are bad for business. Now-I don't want you leaving today feeling guilty because you bought a new pair of shoes or gadget. But the deeper message of being grateful for what you have is to ignore the voices that tell you you are not enough. It's ok to want a new TV, but the new TV has no bearing on your worth as a human being. You are infinitely loved and fearfully and wonderfully made. You are enough. You have everything you need. Gratitude then becomes a practice in being mindful that you are created in the image of God.

2. Live Purposefully

It is easier to be generous when you have a purpose. Philanthropy experts agree that people give more when there is a sense of identity or purpose. Political ads make great use of this, a fact that has probably not gone unnoticed in this election cycle. People do not want to give money to a cause that seems chaotic. In a similar way, a generous spirit is stoked in our own lives when we cultivate our own sense of purpose. As Christians, our purpose is to follow Jesus. "Following Jesus involves seeking to do his will: caring for others and trying to heal the brokenness in our world. We find meaning not in acquiring things, but in loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves."¹

3. Be Generous toward God and Others

Our God is an abundant God. This is a God who delivered an entire nation from the hands of slavery; who fed thousands with a young boy's lunch. This is a God who empties himself even to the point of dying on a cross. God made us to be generous.

"We give individually and corporately. Among the most important ways we give together is through the ministries of the church to which we belong. There we give, together, and have resources not only for the work of the church that takes place inside its walls but also the work that takes place through the church in the world. When we individually give our tithes and offerings as an expression of worship and gratitude to God, we also make it possible for the church to have a collective impact on the world around us that is vast compared to what we can achieve alone."²

¹ Hamilton, Adam. The Walk (p. 97). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

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This is stewardship season in our congregation. Every year we ask the congregation and our community to consider pledging their money, as well as time and other skills. Our theme for this year is “Dear to My Heart,” which echoes Jesus’ words that “where treasure is, our hearts are there also.” Trinity is blessed to have a generous community and I hold dear to my heart the ways you repeatedly show up for each other and thereby embody the Grace of God. This past week was our first outing as a Food Distribution site. You may have seen our story on the news. Our Food Distribution is the result of your generosity—dozens of you are giving generously of your time and expertise to make sure this ministry runs smoothly. Ministries like this are only possible because we have a community that is also generous with their money. Because of your giving, even if you were not there loading food boxes into truck, you were just as much part of the effort. Our collective generosity, combined with our sense of purpose, helps us be a force of justice in the world.

Generosity is the great subversive act of the Church because we preach abundance in the face of scarcity. It turns out, there is always more money in the duck, and it can make a world of difference. Amen.