

Jonah 4
Psalm 99
Acts 4:1-4
Luke 18:8-17

Sermon Series: Generosity

Sermon February 10th, 2019

Being Generous Isn't Easy!

When we read our bibles, we come across a common theme throughout: God creates us, shapes us, and invites us to be people who at the core of our very being are generous. We see this generosity in our lives as we try to live out Jesus' invitation to be generous. Sometimes we are very generous, especially to those we love. Especially towards a cause we are passionate about.

However, we also see in our bibles, in our lives, that at times we struggle to live out this invitation to be generous towards others. We struggle to see that at the core of our very being is generosity.

In our reading of Jonah, God calls Jonah to be generous to the Assyrians who have hurt his people. Now on the surface God's request may not look like such a heavy burden. So, the people said or did some things to hurt you. Move on. Forgive already.

But, if we remember our history we see that Assyria practically destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel leaving just a small remnant behind. They were ruthless to the Israelites in so many ways. It is quite reasonable for Jonah to struggle with God's invitation.

Whatever the case may be, God invites Jonah to go to Nineveh to give the Assyrians an opportunity to receive God's forgiveness. Being generous isn't easy.

In our reading of Acts, God calls Peter and John to share stories about the love of Christ to others. Or in other words, Peter and John are invited to share God's generous gift of Jesus with others. Yet, they will face persecution and prison for sharing this generosity with others. Being generous isn't easy.

In our gospel reading of Luke, Jesus invites this rich person to give up everything he has to help God's mission. Or in other words, to generously give all he has so that others may experience God's love and generosity as well. Of course, he has relied on his wealth to feed and clothe himself. He has relied on his wealth to give him possessions that give him some enjoyment out of life. He has relied on his wealth to give him power and status in his community. And now Jesus wants him to give it all away? Being generous isn't easy.

In all three stories, God is inviting the people to be generous to others. In two of the three stories, the people struggle to be the generous people God creates, shapes, and calls them to be.

In our reading of Jonah, we see that instead of finally accepting God's invitation to show generosity to the Assyrians, Jonah is angry that God wants to forgive the Assyrians. Earlier in this story Jonah doesn't even get on the right boat. Now, after the Assyrians have repented for the wrong they did Jonah still can't get behind God on this one. Instead, Jonah sits back watching. Hoping that God will finally punish these underserving people.

The rich person in our gospel becomes sad and walks away from Jesus' invitation. The rich person feels like he has worked so hard for his wealth. The rich person has enjoyed the status, power, and material things his wealth has given him. How can he give it all up, and trust another way?

Like I said earlier, being generous isn't easy. It isn't easy to forgive someone who hurt us. Or to accept God's choice to forgive those who hurt us. How many of us here can relate to Jonah's story? How many of us here continue to hold onto anger struggling to forgive those who have hurt us?

It isn't easy to be generous when this call to generosity is asking us to give more than we feel we can give. How often does God call us to give in ways that sometimes feel overwhelming? It takes an insurmountable amount of trust to believe that if we give more than we feel we can give that somehow God will care for us and our families. That we won't feel the impact of that giving in a negative way.

We live in an economic system where we depend a lot on our finances. In fact, we see through polls that for most of us our political alliances are with

the party who sees money in a similar way that we do. Our votes are often dictated more by economic struggles than by issues that impact human relationships.

And so, we understand why this rich man walks away sad. He isn't a bad person. He tries hard to follow the commands. He even reaches out to Jesus for guidance. But like many of us, he has become dependent on his wealth. He struggles to let go of this dependence and redirect his wealth and his trust to God who gave him everything he has.

In the other story we see that Peter and John do follow Jesus' invitation to spread the generosity of Christ to others. Everyday people are listening to their message about Jesus and becoming more generous themselves. Generosity is contagious.

Yet, Peter and John get arrested for being generous. For inviting people to experience the love of Christ. It sounds ridiculous if you ask me. However, sometimes when we are generous to others we face suffering. How many of us here have been taken advantage of when being generous? For example, you give every part of yourself to a person making yourself vulnerable to that person. And then the person ends up using you. Abusing you. Hurting you. Or you give generously to help and then find out the company or person you gave to was fraudulent.

It isn't easy to be generous. We all can relate to Jonah, Peter, John, and the rich man. Yet, when the disciples ask who then can be saved? Jesus replies that with God anything is possible.

Even though we struggle to depend on God. God's gracious love for us continues to call us back to God. Call us back to worship to hear the Word of God. Reassuring us that we can depend on God. Call us back to the table where we experience God's generosity in the body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Call us back to pray and sing songs of thanksgiving reminding us that everything we have is a gift from God.

Even though we struggle to be generous when people take advantage of us God's healing and renewing power breathes new life into us giving us new opportunities to help others. God invites us back to the font where we remember that every day we experience new life in the waters of our baptism. God opens our hearts to see that even on the cross where Jesus

is experiencing suffering due to his generosity God's redeeming and generous work is happening. People's bad reactions to God's generosity doesn't stop God from being generous.

Even though we struggle to forgive, God's grace inspires us to keep working on letting go. God's grace sometimes steps in for us and forgives for us, knowing that sometimes our hearts are too fragile to forgive.

Yes, being generous isn't easy, but God has created us with generous hearts. And when we live out this generosity in our world we feel good, because we are reconnecting with the very person God has created us to be. We are depending on God to give us life. We are depending on God's grace to empower us to forgive. Being generous isn't easy, but with God anything is possible.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you give us opportunities to be generous. When we struggle to forgive. When we find ourselves feeling jaded by the unhealthy actions of others in response to our generosity. When we struggle to depend on you. Help us. Heal our wounded hearts. Redirect us to those places where we depend on you. Encourage us to be the generous people you created us to be. **Amen.**