

2 Kings 4:8-10
Psalm 1
Acts 2:42-47
Luke 19:1-10

Sermon February 24th, 2019

Generosity is Contagious

In the first week of this sermon series we heard stories that reflected some of the challenges we face when trying to be generous to others. Last week we heard stories about how God's generosity can be so unimaginable and life altering for us who experience it.

This week we hear stories where people who are touched by God's generosity reciprocate this generosity to others. For example, in our reading of 2 Kings this morning this Shunamite woman shows hospitality to Elisha by inviting him in for a meal every time he is in the area. Eventually she talks her significant other into creating a space for Elisha to stay. We stopped there in our reading this morning, which is only half way through this story. If we read further we see that Elisha feels thankful for the hospitality this woman has shown him, and so, offers to help her out. Generosity is contagious.

In our reading in the book of Acts this morning, we hear that the new believers are inspired by the generous hospitality of the disciples that they too decide to give away property and possessions to help support the people in their newfound community. Generosity is contagious.

In our gospel this morning, Zacchaeus a chief tax collector, is chosen by Jesus out of a large crowd of people to have dinner with. Now some people didn't like the fact that Jesus chooses to hang out with a chief tax collector. What respectful religious leader and social reformer would want to hang out with someone who is so entwined in the corrupt tax system that the Roman imperial order has implemented. He has probably cheated at least a few people in that crowd. And let's not forget the animosity people feel towards Rome for the way the imperial order has treated the non-Roman people. Many in the crowd would see the tax collector and Jesus as a traitor to their people.

However, this is who Jesus chooses to hang out with. In response to Jesus' generous grace and love shown towards Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus offers to

give half his earnings to help those in need. And for anyone he has cheated, which is probably quite a few, he will give much more than he is expected to give for retribution. According to the Mosaic laws someone is to give double of what they cheated the person out of. Well, Zacchaeus is willing to give back four times of what he cheated people out of.

When Jesus says salvation has come upon this household, he means many people are impacted in a positive way by Zacchaeus' newfound generosity. The people he cheated. The poor among them. Himself and his family who in the moment he sought retribution and showed generosity became respected figures in their community once again. Remember a wife and children were tied to the husband/father's reputation. Generosity is contagious.

In Canada when we hear the word contagious we think colds, flu, even measles outbreaks. We know it doesn't take much to get sick in the middle of winter. Some of us spend December to March fighting colds, flu, and also nursing others back to health.

Similarly, when we share God's generosity with others it can be as contagious as catching a cold or a flu. People are instantly impacted by generosity, and more often than not, they reciprocate this generosity to others.

The pay it forward movement that came out a few years back argued that if one showed generosity to a complete stranger that stranger would then show generosity to someone else. Amazingly when this theory was put into practice many people who were shown generosity actually went on to show generosity to others making their community a friendlier place to live in.

What is that old age wisdom we often hear from others: One random act of kindness a day can change the world.

In our own lives we could probably think back and remember many stories where someone's generosity moved us to be generous to others. Or where our reflection of God's generosity towards others was reciprocated.

The word contagious may come with its baggage as we first think of all the illnesses we could contract during this cold winter season. Yet, imagine if everyone in our world caught generosity like we catch colds. Our world would be looking a lot different.

As the church, as followers of Jesus we are invited to live out generosity spreading it to everyone we encounter. Unlike a cold where we are asked to stay home or at least cough in our elbow and obsessively use hand sanitizer. With generosity we are asked to immerse ourselves in places where people dwell. We are asked to cough the spirit of generosity on others. To reach out our hands with germs and all to those in need. Metaphorically speaking of course.

We do this when we create an environment where people feel welcome. Where women feel valued and supported in leadership roles. Where women feel safe and respected in our faith communities. Where people of other faiths feel comfortable enough to gather with us to worship, to feed and cloth people, to dialogue working towards solutions to our societal problems. Where visitors feel connected to us the moment they walk in the door. Where people of all walks of life feel safe from discrimination and judgment.

We do this when we have our annual clothing giveaway or our monthly offering to support organizations like the food bank. Helping people meet their needs during this difficult time.

We do this every time we smile at a stranger. We do this every time we decide to buy the coffee for the person behind us in the line at the Tim Hortons or Starbucks. We do this every time we let someone merge in during rush hour. We do this every time we shovel our neighbor's walk.

We do this all the time spreading generosity to all we encounter, because Jesus shows us generosity all the time. Every time we fall short Jesus is there whispering in our ear: I forgive you. Jesus is there lifting us up. Jesus is there providing for our needs. Jesus is there welcoming us. Jesus is there valuing us. Empowering us to create safe spaces. Jesus is even there smiling at us. Getting our next coffee. Letting us merge in during rush hour. Shoveling our walks. Generosity is contagious.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for your generous love shown to us through Christ Jesus. Inspire us to spread this generosity to others. In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**