

SERMON FOR STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY AT OUR REDEEMER 11-18-18

Matthew 16:24-26 “Generous Giving – “Giving In”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul.”

Let me share a joke with you that will reveal my age; I believe it goes back to the 60’s. The setting is a ‘man-on-the-street interview. Question: “Do you think the two greatest issues of our day are ignorance and apathy?” Answer: “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” While the joke may be old it begs a question for today. Would you agree that ignorance and apathy damage the cause of Jesus Christ, de-energize the mission of his church, and leave Jesus’ followers with little passion for generous giving?

Generous giving – when we use this term let’s not think about it as exclusively financial in nature, but rather as a lifestyle of deep love for Jesus Christ and extraordinary generosity toward opportunities of service and the advancing of His kingdom here on earth. In other words generous giving is both relational and missional as well as financial.

Last month Pastor Hartwig introduced the idea of a triangle to help us understand the concept of generous giving. The picture is that of a triangle, a triangle with three separate, unique sides. The three sides of the generous giving triangle are:

- **“Giving up”** – expressing deep love for God;

- **“Giving out”** – expressing profound love for those who are not yet Jesus’ followers; and
- **“Giving In”** – expressing exemplary love for those who are part of God’s family.

Generous giving requires all three. Pastor shared with us thoughts on “giving up” and “giving out”. Today, as Jesus says, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”** we are going to talk about generous giving by focusing on: **“Giving In.”**

To be clear, **“giving in”** is not about losing, such as an argument. **Giving in** is about direction. It is about directing exemplary love for those who are part of God’s family in the Church.

When you are a spectator at the Indianapolis 500 auto race, you become a participant in one of the most adrenalin producing events imaginable. To the ordinary fan, cars traveling at more than two hundred miles per hour is staggering. The sound of the engines as the cars race past you is an incredible roar. The skill level, strength, and endurance of those women and men who race the cars is absolutely remarkable. The speed and precision of those who service the cars during the race is phenomenal. The race is so fast and the requirement to win are so high that those who are on the track literally put their lives at risk in order to be the champion. In that race, ignorance and apathy have no place. That combination would be deadly.

Spectators experience adrenalin and high excitement because the commitment of the racing teams is so high, the demands of the race itself so large, and the finish to the race so spectacular.

Commitment, demand, and spectacular finish set the context for the words Jesus speaks: **“Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”** He speaks these

words to his disciples as he share with them about the conclusion to his own earthly life. **“Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”** No ignorance or apathy here. Jesus is singling them out to describe the commitment and demand and also his spectacular finish, which we call Easter.

Having disclosed his own suffering, death, and resurrection, he speaks to his disciples about what it means to continue with him. No small commitment. No minimal demand. No unspectacular finish. **“If any would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

Two important implications are clearly connected to this word of Jesus.

- First, while the pronouns are singular, Jesus is addressing the whole group. Each individual follower of Jesus will continue to follow in this way. At the same time, the word and the invitation to follow Jesus is addressed to the whole group. For today, that means the call to follow is extended to me and to the whole Church.
- Second, because the invitation to follow Jesus requires the conversion of life from sin and self to Savior, each individual follower of Jesus needs the support, encouragement, counsel, instruction, and love from the other followers of Jesus. This is not a journey to be traveled alone. But what does all this have to do with generous giving? In particular, what does it have to do with **“giving in”** – directing exemplary love for those who are part of the family of God in the Church? Matthew records earlier in this chapter: **“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples.”** He instructs them concerning his suffering, his death, and his resurrection.

These actions of Jesus express God's generous giving. These actions show that Jesus is "giving in," He is directing exemplary love for those who are closest to him, his followers.

'GIVING IN,' AS IT RELATES TO GENEROUS GIVING, IS NOT ABOUT LOSING, BUT ABOUT LOVING THOSE WHO JOURNEY WITH YOU AS JESUS' FOLLOWERS, ABOUT SUPPORTING AND SUSTAINING EACH INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT, DEMAND, AND FINISH IN JESUS CHRIST FOR THE BENEFIT AND BLESSING OF THE INDIVIDUAL AS WELL AS THE WHOLE GROUP.

Jesus describes it this way: **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"** (John 13:35)

So there it is:

- No small commitment: Deny yourself;
- No small demand: Take up your cross;
- No unspectacular finish: Follow Jesus.

So, what can we learn from the words of Jesus to help me think and act differently about generous giving?

First, generous giving is a process, not a single point in time. The starting point is not the same as the finish line. Growth in my understanding and capacity to live as a generous giver is a daily event. To deny yourself literally means to disown yourself. Generous giving is a daily commitment to be Jesus' follower living in a community of Jesus' followers.

On this day we are told, Jesus *began* to teach his disciples about his commitment, demand and his spectacular finish. And Jesus would have to tell them more than once. It

was a process, a slow growth. St. Paul helps us understand why this process can be frustratingly slow for us as well: **“I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I keep on doing...”**

So, each day is a process, a process of growing in my understanding and capacity to live as a generous giver as I intentionally turn away from my selfish, sinful desires and intentionally follow Jesus in a community of Jesus’ followers. In this way generous giving is relational, for it expresses deep connection to God and my fellow believers.

Second, generous giving brings purpose to my life. A key to a purposeful life is to take up my cross daily. At the time Jesus spoke these words, the cross may well have been the most torturous instrument of death in existence. And for the disciples, taking up the cross meant this very real possibility.

To take up my cross describes the reality that something in me must die. This death will not be easy. This death may be personally painful, but it is necessary. As Jesus’ follower and a generous giver, my sinful selfishness, my preference for personal advantage, and my reluctance to make Jesus and His Cross the center of my life, must die daily.

Generous giving is purpose-full. Jesus loves me and gave his life for my salvation. Because of his purpose as Savior the cross could not be avoided. To take up my cross daily is God’s call to me and his whole church. It’s the call to love one another as we are loved by Jesus. God calls us to live daily with a purpose in Jesus Christ expressing love to God and other followers of Jesus, even when it is most costly.

Third, generous giving focuses the direction of my life and my life’s resources. **“Follow Me”** is not only an invitation

that Jesus extends to me, but is also an invitation for all of Jesus' followers. Together, we follow him. This invitation comes with instruction through His Word.

- For generous giving, his Word teaches and promises:

- **“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine”**

Proverbs 3:9-10

- **“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured back to you”** Luke 6:38.

- For **“Giving In”** – directing exemplary love for those who are part of God's family in the Church—his Word teaches and promises:

- Galatians 6:10 **“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”**

- Acts 2:44-47 **“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who are being saved.”**

What a blessing is ours – to be a part of the family of God here at Our Redeemer. To be at a place where the Gospel message of God’s love for us in Christ Jesus is central to all that we do; to be with people who share the same faith in Jesus and who desire to share that faith with this community and with the world. Knowing salvation is ours we are all about generous giving.

Generous Giving is not an abstract concept. Generous Giving, as we have talked about it in these past three stewardship weekends (once each month), is about:

- **Giving Up** – Knowing that our generous giving toward God begins with God’s generous gift to us – His Son as our Lord and Savior; we are forgiven and God gives us the faith to believe it!
- **Giving Out** – Jesus was an intentional missionary – He continually reached out to those who did not know Him to give them an opportunity to hear about His saving work. We too are to be generous givers who have a strong love for Jesus and a strong desire to share Him with those who are not yet one of His followers.
- **Giving In** – No small commitment here: Deny yourself; No small demand here: Take up your cross; no unspectacular finish: Follow Jesus. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it!”

May your love for Jesus find expression in your life in the form of Generous Giving! And may such Generous Giving also be a part of our life together here at Our Redeemer. **Amen.**