

Sunday, April 21, 2024
First Lesson: Psalm 139:13-14
Gospel Lesson: Luke 6: 38
Sermon Series: Becoming: Generous
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are continuing with our Becoming Sermon Series which is a series designed to take us on a 50 day journey towards Pentecost that equates to be exactly 7 Sundays between Easter and Holy Pentecost which lands on May 19, 2024 this year.

- This week our emphasis of “becoming,” will be centered on the topic of generous.
- To ensure that we are on the same page of what it means for us to be generous, let's reflect **on the essence of generosity**, exploring its manifestations both in the worldly realm and in the sacred teachings.
- **In our worldly understanding**, generosity often revolves around material giving - sharing our possessions, wealth, or time with others.
- It's a noble act, rooted in empathy and kindness, but it can sometimes be limited by conditions or expectations.

- How I interpret and understand this secular explanation is to consider that I may give with the hope of receiving recognition or repayment, or perhaps out of a sense of duty rather than genuine compassion.
- While these acts are commendable, they may lack the depth and transformative power found in spiritual generosity.
- From a spiritual and biblical perspective, generosity transcends mere material giving.
- It's about extending the same grace and abundance that we have received from a higher source - be it from the divine, the universe, or however a person may perceive it.
- This form of generosity flows from a place of unconditional love and gratitude, with no strings attached.
- It's giving without expecting anything in return, trusting that the act itself is its own reward.
- Furthermore, how I see this spiritual definition unfolding in our gospel lesson this morning is in this

verse, Jesus is teaching his disciples about the principle of generosity from a spiritual perspective.

- He uses vivid imagery to illustrate the nature of giving and receiving in the kingdom of God.
- Firstly, Jesus emphasizes the act of giving: "Give, and it will be given to you."
- It is in this verse, "Give, and it will be given to you," that I believe we are receiving **a call to action**.
- **I see this as a call to action**, inviting Christ's followers to engage in acts of generosity **without reservation or expectation of return**.
- It's an encouragement to be proactive in sharing our blessings with others, whether it be our material possessions, time, talents, or love.
- Moving further in the text, the imagery that follows - "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap" - for me, **paints a vivid picture of abundance**.
- Jesus assures his disciples that when they give generously, they will receive abundantly in return.

- The measure of blessings they receive will be overflowing, beyond what they can contain or imagine.
- Finally, Jesus underscores the principle of reciprocity: "For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
- I interpret this as saying that the manner in which we give will directly impact the blessings we receive.
- **If I give** with a generous and open heart, I will receive blessings in abundance.
- However, **if I give** sparingly or begrudgingly, I may limit the blessings that come my way.

- **Our Wednesday night class “Applying the Sermon to Life” in their conversation in which I was not present for, but I was fortunate to be able to read their notes, did a really fine job taking all of what I have named into contemplation and presented what I would call a moral moment for our congregation to consider.**
- You see Church, the class began to explore generosity by way of our membership vows to Lincoln First.
- The overarching question posed is: What transformative effects could arise if we were to increase our commitment to the five areas outlined in our membership vows?
- In other words, what would it look like if our Church community decided to give more by way of our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness?
- For why I have couched this conversation from Wednesday night to be considered a moral moment

is because it challenges you and I to examine our attitudes and actions towards giving.

- Am I giving freely and generously, or am I holding back out of fear or self-interest?
- It invites you and I to cultivate a mindset of abundance and trust in the divine providence, knowing that when you and I give with love and sincerity, we are participating in the flow of grace and abundance that enriches both giver and receiver.
- **So let's look at some examples of what it looks like to give more in each of our membership vows beginning with prayer.**
- Now typically, I am guilty of beginning meetings and spiritual practices within the Church and outside with a rather rushed prayer.
- If I am honest, prayer in either small or larger groups makes me anxious for a myriad of reasons.
- Does everyone believe in the same way that I do?
- Do I have time to take an extra moment in a meeting that is already filled to the brim with Church business?

- So in light of our topic this week, I decided to put in more to my prayer life privately and publicly.
- In meetings and counseling sessions and at home, I have taken the extra steps to create my own altar space with a lit candle, play contemplative music with the caveat that it has to be at least 2 minutes long to quiet my brain; and provide a prayer that captures the essence of what it is about to occur.
- The outcome that I observed was deeper connections with others, shared vulnerability and trust, creative ideas and input from all people involved both introverted and extroverted and lowered anxiety within myself and others around me....MORE!
- **Looking at an example of how one might give more in their presence;**
- Admittedly I have so many personal examples to share of the abundance that I have witnessed as a result of my giving more of my presence but I will limit it to one story;

- I'd like to share with you the transformation that has occurred between my mother-in-law and myself, where I have witnessed a shift in my heart move from her becoming my mother-in-law to my mother-in-love; and I believe in my heart the same has occurred for her.
- You have heard me preaching about her and I a lot; this is because my dream of us becoming closer has been a desire I have had for a very long time.
- However, it wasn't until Steve and I made a conscientious effort to increase our time spent with her, that our relationship could be transformed.
- It started with the Steiff documentary where I fell in love with the Steiff Teddy Bear mainly because I learned about it with her;
- **From there**, Steve and I found an original Steiff teddy bear to give to her on Easter morn,
- **From there**, we have eaten with my mother-in-love every other Friday at her retirement community home,

- **From there**, we have established this to be a fixed date come rain or come shine.
- This past Friday, I witnessed our relationship really unfold where my mother-in-law invited us after dinner to her apartment to share and learn more.
- We met her friends who played cards, the retirement community eagerly have begun to greet us warmly and they all expressed how they especially love my hats—none of this would ever have transpired if Steve and myself had not made the decision to **give MORE!**
- Looking at the next two membership vows of service and gifts together for these two experiences I am about to share interconnects contextually for us;
- Beginning with service, I received permission to share a moment from a member in our Church community, that quite frankly still has me in awe how this individual is using her service and gifts to help transform our Church as a whole;
- I had the opportunity to catch the majority of Jennifer Honebrink's presentation, the co-chair of the Board of

Trustees and skillful architect that she is, and I never felt prouder to be a leader at this Church of Lincoln First United Methodist Church as a result.

- Jennifer gave a stellar presentation to the Historic Preservation Committee this past Thursday at our County City Building.
- She presented slideshows that reflected the historical richness of our Church building itself and shared a deep level of expertise that additional members such as who I would ascribe as our Church historian Paul Collister and perhaps protege in the making Kim Ebers, Jill Hubka and co chair- Grady Turner has assisted with. Please forgive me if I left any names out, but these are the people I have heard from the community as primarily assisting with this level of detail and research.
- All of these efforts helped us to receive a unanimous vote in favor of support for the nomination of our Church of Lincoln First being recognized as a historical place in the state of Nebraska.

- Our next step is to have this nomination presented to the state board on May 10....MORE!
- Furthermore, how this connects with our gifts that for me includes both our time and our financial resources, this is a long way of my naming that how we have remained as this once hole in the ground Church for roughly 115 years is not by giving less, **it has been by giving more!**
- For me this is why from a stewardship perspective which is very different from finances we must be committed to giving more.
- I believe that finances, while crucial for the sustenance of our earthly operations, are merely the tangible aspect of our stewardship journey.
- **Finances** represent the resources entrusted to us by the divine, to be managed with wisdom, integrity, and accountability.
- **Our stewardship**, on the other hand, encompasses a much broader and deeper responsibility - it is the sacred call to nurture and enhance the gifts bestowed upon us for the greater good.

- **With finances**, a person may focus solely on the balance sheets, budgets, and bottom lines.
- **Finances are** limited to meeting quotas or fulfilling obligations, viewing our contributions through the lens of obligation or duty.
- However, **true stewardship** for me transcends mere financial transactions.
- It involves the holistic care and cultivation of all that we have been given - our time, talents, treasures, and the very environment in which we live and worship....MORE!
- Lastly, the final example of looking at how to give more **in our witness**,
- I have to share a personal story about my bonus son Ashton, who is cloaked in the same generous fashion as my husband Stephen.
- For me, seeing our son blossom by way of our small groups, ministry offerings, service projects, fellowship opportunities and more offered within our Church community, is why I aspire to give more in the other areas we have already talked about.

- For just about every opportunity our Church has offered by way of spiritual growth, fellowship, service and learning, our son has soaked up like a sponge.
- So much so that this past Thursday evening, Ashton won tickets to a jazz concert in which his teacher played the saxophone.
- It was there that I came across one of the best jazz singers I have heard, Camille Metoyer Morten who lives in Omaha.
- Camille and I exchanged information and Ashton and I took a picture with her.
- Camille let us know that she offers her gifts wherever invited— which then led to an unexpected collaboration initiated by our son, that I know will pay dividends to our congregation and community in the near future...MORE!
- These are just prime examples that I present to you that our gospel stimulates for us to consider this morning when as it pertains to generosity.

- For true generosity requires you and I to make a commitment to press down and shake things up so that all of the possibilities can surface.
- When I reflect on the act of pressing down, you and I are not merely skimming the surface of our resources or giving out of obligation.
- Instead, we are delving deep into the depths of our hearts, tapping into the wellspring of compassion and abundance that resides within each of us.
- When you and I press down with intentionality, with sincerity, and with a willingness to give of ourselves fully and wholeheartedly, what begins to shake off are the limitation that holds us back from embracing the boundless possibilities that generosity offers us.
- We shake loose the grip of materialism,
- We shake loose the grip of scarcity,
- We shake loose the constraints of fear,

- In pressing down and shaking things up, you and I unleash a torrent of grace and blessings that flow freely and abundantly into our lives and the lives of those around us.
- We create a ripple effect of kindness, compassion, and transformation that reverberates far beyond our immediate circle of influence.
- Let us press down and shake things up with courage and conviction.
- Let us give generously, love extravagantly, and live with open hands and open hearts.
- And in doing so, may we experience the fullness of God's blessings poured out upon us, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.
- Amen
-