

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on November 26, 2017 at Victory of the Lamb on Mark 12:41-44.

Series: Generosity
Today's Focus: Generous Heart

“Who can? You too can! (Be generous that is)”

Think for a moment about a person you admire for their giving spirit, their generosity. Who comes to mind? There are lots of ways to be generous of course. Pastor Bill ran to Kwik Trip this week and bought me a vanilla frosted long john. That was pretty awesome!

But the person who comes to mind the most for me would have to be my Grandma Kuerth. She's probably the most thoughtfully generous person I know. Need help with anything? She'll be there...and bring the tools. Need help getting anywhere? She'll fill up your tank with gas. Hungry? She'll take you out for lunch—on her own birthday—and pay for it. In high school she would take me out to Culvers after every band concert and basketball game, even when we lost.

Now my Grandma Kuerth isn't what you'd typically call rich although she's not what you'd call poor either. Yet she's always been generous with her time, her money and her attention. She has a generous, giving spirit. It comes from her heart of faith. We're going to talk about the importance of our faith when it comes to being generous. In our Bible lesson today we're going to see how Jesus directs our attention to another generous grandma lady to help us learn, *“Who can? You too can! (Be generous that is).”*

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

So it's that time of year when you go to the store and sometimes just inside the doors in the entryway there's a red kettle, right? And maybe there's a person standing there ringing a bell to draw your attention to it. And if you wanted to you could kind of just watch the crowds of people coming in and observe who's putting money into the kettle.

That's kind of how it was in Jesus' day. The temple complex in Jerusalem was a large place. And when people came into the temple there were actually 13 different trumpet shaped kettles where people could place their offering on their way in.

So imagine this scene for a moment. Pretend that the way we gathered offerings here at Victory of the Lamb was that we had two red kettles in the lobby just outside the doors to the sanctuary. And so imagine Jesus' story in this setting. Pretend that Jesus and his 12 disciples were hanging out in our lobby sitting on the bench along the window. And they're just watching, maybe having a little bite to eat—no bacon though. But they're observing. They're observing everyone going into worship. On their way in people reach into their pockets or purses to get their offering.

Now in Jesus' day they didn't have online giving or a text-to-give method. And they didn't have credit cards or carry cash. They had coins, ok? So while in the lobby, Jesus and his disciples observe that some people's offerings are shiny. Gold and silver coins glinting in the sunlight streaming through the window. Some people's offerings make a loud *clang* in the kettle.

But then they notice something else. Before giving an offering, a few people would stop to look around as if they cared about who was watching (besides God of course!). A few seemed to make a bit of a show reaching into their pockets as they grabbed a fistful of coins. One or two even pulled out their new iPhone and took a selfie while holding their offering above the kettle. One young man posted it immediately to Instagram. *#Blessed! *Little pointy finger up to heaven emoji**.

Over the next couple minutes a few people were seen to be checking their phones during the confession of sins to see how many people had liked their offering selfies in the last 10 minutes. After seeing what she thought was a poor response by her followers, one person deleted her post by the time the sermon started because she was disappointed she hadn't gotten enough likes for her act of charity.

Meanwhile then someone else comes quietly into lobby. She's so slight of frame that her feet barely make a sound as she walks in the door. Beyond a hello from the Host Team person at the door, hardly anyone even notices her. Her clothes are a bit tattered and worn. She's not wearing any designer labels—(not like she cares what anybody thinks anyway). She's not here to take a selfie. She's here to give *herself* to God. She's not in the least way dependent on what other people think of her. She's dependent on God to take complete care of her. Yet amazingly, on her way into the sanctuary she too has something to give, a few dull copper coins (did they even make a sound?) and then she goes in to worship.

Do you see what Jesus is getting at? Generosity starts with our heart. It's a matter of our faith in God. ⁴¹ **Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.** ⁴² **But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.**

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Friends, in my sermon last Sunday, I talked about how money in and of itself isn't a bad thing. It can actually be a blessing—especially when we make the most of it to share God's love with others. If you weren't here for our Thanksgiving Eve service Wednesday, maybe you heard. We didn't collect an offering. We actually gave one away. Over \$2,000! Everyone received an envelope with money in it to give away to bless others in the name of Jesus. So if you received one of the envelopes Wednesday, I hope you're experiencing the great joy of being generous. Be sure and tell us about it. *#BecauseOfJesus / Whether you are rich or poor—whether you're an adult with a career or a kid with an allowance...Who can? You too can! (Be generous that is.)*

There are a couple ways the love of money can keep us from being generous though. One is when we equate money with security. In other words when we fall into the trap of thinking "I'll be generous when I think I have enough. I'll start honoring God when I get enough." But what does *enough* mean? The

Bible says, **“Whoever loves money never has enough” (Ecc. 5:10)**. In other words if you’re planning to just wait to be generous until you have enough, you’ll never actually be generous.

Another trap is when we equate money with status—or when we fall in love with money because of its potential to boost our status. This can happen when you see people who always seem to have new stuff, are going on vacations, posting on social media about their exciting experiences or showing off their cool stuff whether it’s a new car or another sweet guitar...and that can be all fine...except that you become envious of their status. And so you’re hindered in having the joy of giving because what you crave more than anything else is the praise and affection of other people. You seek their status. There’s actually a phenomenon on the internet called a “Fakecation.” Have you heard of that? It’s when people stage or photoshop a picture to share on social media that makes it look like they’re in some exotic place having fun when they’re really not. They do it to boost their status. They do it to make others jealous.

But you know when it comes to both security and status—the truth is we have something far more certain than wealth will ever be. And we have a status greater than any human approval we could ever gain. We have a mighty fortress who is our God and the enduring word of him who calls us heirs of heaven and co-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Imagine if Jesus had stayed in heaven and simply posted divine selfies... #Blessed! / #MyCrib / #SaviorLife and then waited for our world’s universal approval before deciding whether he would consider leaving it all behind? Imagine if Jesus had waited for a 100% popularity rating before exchanging his glory in paradise to live here in poverty, to be rejected and forsaken, to be tortured and executed on the cross for us? Would he have ever come down to be our Savior—the one we truly needed? No. And yet he did. He did because of grace. He did because he placed his total dependence on the plan that he and his Father drew up before time began to rescue a world full of ungrateful, greedy, selfish, insecure idolaters like me.

Friends, when you gave thanks this week, what was at the top of your thank-you list? Was it Jesus? Was it thanks for the ultimate security and status you have because of his victory shared with you through your baptism? You know, giving always involves trust. And trust is a matter of the heart. It’s a matter of faith. It’s to trust that if God didn’t spare his own Son, that means you can’t ever out-give his ability to give you just what you need and more—including hands washed clean from the sin of greed and a heart set free from the trap of envy and worry.

That’s what Jesus is commending the poor widow for in our Bible story today. It’s not the quantity of her offering he’s commending; it’s the quality of her faith. Jesus isn’t saying you have to give all your money like the widow did because God actually wants something more. He wants you to give him all your heart—your faith, your trust. So right now in your life, ask yourself this question, “Is my giving of my time, my talents, my wisdom, my attention, my available resources and means...is it a true reflection of my trust in God?” Am I truly being generous? Because *“Who can? You too can! (Be generous that is).”*

Sometimes people aren’t generous because they’re worried about having enough. Well God says, “I’ll take care of you.” Sometimes people aren’t generous because they’re worried about what other people think. Well God says, “Don’t worry about the approval of the world when you have the approval of the King of Kings.” See friends, whether you are rich or poor, no matter what label is on your clothes, or logo on your car, no matter how many likes your pictures get on social media...you are accepted, approved,

and loved by the One before whom all the angels bow and sing “Holy, holy, holy.” So who are you to worry?

Here’s something else. Small acts of selfishness become bigger ones over time. If you wait to be generous, you’ll never be generous. But so also small acts of generosity where you trust God become bigger over time as you experience the joy of giving and the faithfulness of God. So start somewhere! Wherever God prompts you to trust. *Because who can? You too can! (Be generous that is.)*

Let me finish with a story. Two years ago we had just about completed our brand new ministry center—the building you’re in. This was a massive undertaking. And like with any building project there were some unforeseen challenges and difficult decisions to make. We got to a point where we had just enough money to complete the shell of the building but at the time didn’t have enough for anything inside it.

So we took everything you see here in the sanctuary now out of the budget. We didn’t have money for the chairs. We didn’t have money for any special art or furnishings. We didn’t have any money for projectors, speakers, and sound boards. So in order to complete the building itself we literally took that all out of the budget and said, “Ok God, here’s what we think we need. Help us come up with whatever you know it is that we need.”

I called up a friend—someone who has been a generous giver throughout our church’s 11 year history. I invited him over for a tour of the new building. I explained our situation. And I said, “You’ve been a supporter of our ministry a long time. You’ve seen how God has blessed us. I know you have a heart for sharing the gospel of Jesus. Would you consider giving a \$50,000 gift by the end of the year to help us afford a quality a/v system?” And on the spot, you know what happened? He wrote me a check. So we have speakers and a sound board and computers to live stream the gospel message anywhere in the world.

But this story isn’t about the size of that gift. It’s about the faith of the giver. Check this out. You see a week after my friend wrote me that check, he gave me a call. And he said, “Ben, I have to tell you something.” (And I was thinking, “Oh no, is he going to ask for the money back or something like that?”) He said, “It’s been a tough year for the business. We’ve had to make some hard decisions. And after I wrote you that check my wife and my accountant both said, ‘What were you thinking?’ So I said, ‘Look, we’re going to trust God like we always do. God’s Word says to put his kingdom first and he promises he’ll take care of everything we need.’ And my accountant said, ‘Well that’s great. You trust God, but look, I trust you and that wasn’t a very wise decision.’”

So here’s what my friend said next which still gives me goosebumps. He said, “Ben, here’s why I’m sharing this. I didn’t tell you any of this when I wrote that check...but we’ve been staring at a significant shortfall this year with the business. But today, unexpectedly, we closed a deal into a new market worth \$400,000. The moment I handed you a check everything turned around. I just wanted to celebrate that with you and give all glory to God.”

Friends when it comes to giving, Who can? You too can! Because God can. Who can God do? God is able **“to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”** (Ephesians 3:20-21).