

Introduction

Today we give thanks to the Lord. We're concluding our series "Keep Church Weird" as we've looked at our values as a church family and today we're looking at Generosity Is Our Opportunity.

Mark 12:41-44 (NIV)

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."

Giving Your Kids Everything You Never Had

Some years back I was with a group of folks working on a project on the West Coast, and I was sitting at dinner with them all and I heard a story that changed the way I thought about life. This group and I were talking about generosity and how it impacts generations. There was this one woman in the group named Teresa, and she talked about her father who was not a generous man. He had a great job and made good money, but he was miserable most of his life. He was cheap, he was a hoarder, he was incredibly anxious, and worried all the time. And she spoke about the impact that had on her, and how she knew she didn't want to be like him, so she asked her grandfather one day when she was older how to live differently from her father. You see her Grandfather was the opposite of her Dad, very patient, generous, kind, not worrisome about everything, and gave of himself in ways that impacted everyone around him. So, Teresa asked her Grandfather what had happened to her dad to make him the way he was, and how could she avoid it. Her Grandfather told her that he felt like it was his fault for the way her dad turned out. Teresa was shocked to hear that, how was that even possible, these two men were so different! Her grandfather told her, "I love your father with all my heart, he's my son. But I parented him in such a way that I wanted to make sure that he had a much better life than I did. I wanted him to get the stuff I never had, I wanted him to have experiences I never had, I wanted it to go easier for him than I ever had it, **and in so doing I gave him much of what he wanted, but not what he needed.**"

That story has stuck with me for years now. In essence, what her Grandfather told her was that her father **needed to lack some things in life to know how to truly value it.**

I don't think that way naturally, I don't want to lack anything, I don't want my kids to lack anything! I resonate deeply with Teetee's grandfather, I want my kids to have a better life than I did, I think all of us do!

We all want what we think is better for the next generation.

Isn't it loving and kind to want better for other people?

This is the world we know and are living in, a place of affluence and opportunity, at least here in America.

And isn't God himself generous? I mean read page after page of God's story and you'll see there's no one more generous and giving than God himself.

He gave our world existence

He gave our world purpose

He gave of himself in creating human beings in his image and likeness.

We've celebrities and sports figures who fight hard to make sure no one is making a dime off of their image and likeness, and yet the God of all creation says "You can have it", and then he does that over, and over, and over again in every single person.

Just wait ten seconds 43 new babies made in God's image will be born. He just keeps on giving!

The breath you just took was a gift from God to you. You didn't earn it, you don't deserve it, it's just a gift to you from the Creator of all things.

He gave his one and only son Jesus to heal each of us of the disease of sin and death. He gave his Spirit to those who put their faith in Jesus so we could live an eternal resurrected life now and for all eternity.

And he's called us to be generous people. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Corinth, he encourages those believers to give to those in need in Jerusalem, and he says:

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)

7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

And we should be a people filled with so much joy, fulfillment, and life that we cry out like the Psalmist and say "My cup overflows" (Psalm 23:5).

We should be giving from a place out of an overflow of blessing and prosperity, and not just with money, but with all our lives.

And here is where a normal sermon on generosity would stop and double down. I should just stop here, lay on the guilt, and tell you that no matter how bad you have it, compared to the rest of the world you're one of the richest and most blessed people on the planet, and that would be true.

I would guilt you about not giving enough, and then some of you would love it, some of you would hate it, and some of you would think "There it is, I was waiting for the pastor to say he wanted my money".

But honestly, at the end of the day, this isn't about just money, it's about a generous lifestyle, which yes includes money, but is also about time, energy, gifting, and your presence. I believe that if you're following Jesus and being led by His Spirit you're giving regularly to what God is doing in and through this church. And if you're not, pray about it, and come talk to me about it, there's no shame at all, it's just an invitation.

But, what I want to focus on is about generosity itself, but it's a posture, a way of life that impacts everything. The more I think about generosity, and we grow in it, I don't think we grow in it based on how much we have, but really in how much we don't have, and still give.

Empty Cups

What happens when we're not experiencing an overflow? What happens when you don't even feel like there's much in the cup at all?

What if we're all just a bunch of empty cups?

What can you possibly give when you are tired, exhausted, spent, poor, and then some?

What can you give when you're lacking? You can't give something from nothing right?

Now, our culture says at that point, you need to worry about yourself. Go inward, focus on you! And for some, this might be truly necessary. **Rest is important, burnout is a real thing, but I think we're being conditioned to give up too quickly if I am honest.**

And the cultural remedy for burnout is to focus more on yourself. Let your tank get filled, and then you're good. You're the source of the strength at that point, and I am not sure that's good advice all the time.

I'm not sure many of us know what to do with that, and so we resort to kind of default survival skills. And so there's this thing that gets developed in us where we don't believe that life is abundant, **we start to live with a scarcity mindset.**

A mindset that believes you don't have enough. Resources, life, and even hope are scarce, and so **we need to make sure we have enough**, even if we end up with plenty, **we believe**

that we made that happen on our own, therefore we live **worried and anxious** to make sure we don't lose it!

You see this in Genesis 3, in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve have everything. **But even people who have everything can be tricked into believing that they need something more.**

And a crafty serpent comes and whispers a lie that maybe God's holding out on them, there's more to be gained, and they're lacking in something. **And so instead of trusting God's provision, they try to be like God and get it all for themselves, which is still our struggle today friends.**

I rarely see worried and anxious people taking real steps of faith, and I have rarely seen someone who is constantly anxious and worried be generous. Sure, there are moments, but overall you can't live generously if you are worried and trying to hold onto everything. And when you do try and be generous it comes back to it being about you being in control.

When you live with that scarcity mindset, acts of faith that require you to give of yourself seem impossible. And then you will spend your life waiting until you think you have enough of whatever you need before you'll do anything.

That puts you in control, **you are the one who knows what you need and when enough is enough.**

You won't forgive a person until you feel ready or they've asked you for it.

You won't take that step of faith and obedience until everything is all figured out first.

Over the years I have seen people who God is trying to wake, trying to use, trying to bless in ways they couldn't imagine just stop in their tracks, get stuck in what they wish they had, what wrong has happened to them, or what they believe they're owed.

The problem is if we're the ones determining when enough is enough, "we will never be satisfied."

There's always a need for more time in life, more money, more time, more energy, more everything.

We will use the need for more, to hold us back from actually giving of ourselves now.

This is deadly to our lives friends. You will never grow, heal, or move forward in life if you always have to have enough to give something.

Sometimes life will present you with opportunities to give when you don't have much to give.

For any parent, you experienced this when you had kids. So, when we had our first kid, Jacob, who was not an easy baby, things were tough. It was hard on me, but I think all husbands should just humbly admit it was way harder on our wives. Leslie was 22, her mom had passed away just a year prior, and just a few months after Jacob was born her grandmother passed away, she was working full-time as a nurse, and in many ways, Leslie had given everything she could, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually to this new role as a mother. And there were nights I know where it was really hard, but in that place where she felt like she had nothing left, she dug into a deeper palace, a place that to her knowledge and experience was not there before. She experienced, from God, a new amount of life, love, and care that she could give this child, and then that spilled out into 3 more kids!

But she wouldn't have gotten to that place unless she had been at the end of her rope and discovered God was holding out his hand and inviting her to an even greater place.

We see this in scripture too:

Abraham is called to be a Father of God's nation, but his wife is barren and they're both old, ancient!

Moses called to go back to Egypt, a place he grew up, and where he killed someone which has now left him as a fugitive. He's not much of a leader, really impulsive, and doesn't speak well.

There's even this passage in Deuteronomy where God makes it clear to the Hebrews that he didn't choose them because they were "great" and "awesome":

Deuteronomy 7:7 (NIV)

7 The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

Those are just some examples, but it's clear that in life and God's story, **lacking something is an advantage, lacking itself is an invitation and an opportunity to something much deeper.**

So all these thoughts brought me to the story of this woman, this poor woman, who did something so significant that we're still talking about it today. It's such a small moment that it seems like not much is going on, but there is, so lean in!

The Sound of Generosity

Mark 12:41 (NIV)

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.

This scene takes place in the Temple, in the court of women, the area they were allowed to worship, it was also the treasury.

Jesus sits here, and I read a commentator that suggested Jesus sitting in the Temple was already a controversial move. It was taking a royal posture, and I'm sure that didn't sit well with others around him, especially the religious leaders.

Notice that Mark makes a special note to clue into the fact that Jesus is watching. Jesus is paying attention to people, and what they bring to the Temple. Not to sound stalkerish about it, but I think we forget that Jesus sees us. He sees exactly where we are, what we're engaged in, what we're giving our lives to, and what we're giving our time, energy, and money to, and it matters to him!

Mark 12:41 (NIV)

Many rich people threw in large amounts.

Scattered around the Treasury were collection boxes. They were shaped like trumpets, and you'd put your money down it.

Here's something that we can't appreciate but that's important to this story: the sounds. There are a few moments in scripture where it would be great to hear the sounds to bring things to life, like when God said "Let there be light", or when I picture the great flood in the story of Noah. Here in this story, the sounds are crucial.

When the rich brought their offerings, they would pour their large amounts into the box, creating a flowing sound of coins hitting the box.

Imagine, everyone could hear it, letting everyone in the room know who gave the most, who was in charge, and who had influence.

But then, a twist in the story:

Mark 12:42 (NIV)

42 But a poor widow came and put in two tiny copper coins, worth only a few cents.

This widow brings two small coins (greek → "lepta" → 1% of a daily wage).

She brings these worthless coins, she essentially brings nothing! And the sound is pathetic compared to the other.

In terms of status, influence, ability, resources, and all the rest, **you can't get much worse or in a more dire situation than being a poor widow.**

I don't know what her expression was, or how she felt, but after following up with this outpouring of money from the rich I don't think it's a stretch to think that she may have felt embarrassed, or unworthy, like she doesn't bring much value.

And let's dive even deeper here, as a widow coming to the Temple, I can't help but wonder what her relationship with God looked like. Was she angry, or bitter at her life circumstances, did she feel like God was blessing her at all?

If you want to talk about lacking, there it is! But she brings it anyway, she's in a room with people from all over, with the rich pouring in their goods, and she shows up.

Most of us don't know what it's like to be that poor, **but many of us know what it's like to feel like what you've been handed in life, or what you've made of your life is not much, or at least not what you thought it would be.**

We're waiting for more to show up in our lives, we're waiting for our cup to be filled.

I love what Jesus does here, he huddles up his disciples. I picture him doing the same thing with us, like "I'm letting you in on something that'll change everything for you"

Mark 12:43 (NIV)

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."

Here's the goods. Of course, Jesus turns everything upside down and says that she gave more than the others, but it's the detail of how that matters.

Mark 12:44 (NIV)

44 They all gave out of their wealth;

The others gave from a place of wealth, surplus, abundance, and overflow.

Mark 12:44 (NIV)

but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

"Out of her poverty", out of her lack, she put in everything.

Do you feel this, do you feel the power in this?

Jesus sees this woman, he sees her heart, her situation, her giving and he knows she's giving from all she has to give!

It's in this moment that her generosity, **her gift is an opportunity for her to give all she has to God**, in front of those who give from a place of ease.

In giving God all she had, she was able to **surrender even "her nothing" to him.**

Giving When You Have Nothing, Is An Opportunity To Let God Be Your Everything

Your Lack Is Your Opportunity

There are lessons to be learned and depths in your relationship with God that you can only get to by giving from a place where you have nothing left.

Some of us haven't experienced a closeness to God in a long time or ever because we're trying desperately to hold it all together or waiting for us to have enough when we're really in a desperate moment away from being closer to God than you could imagine.

My prayer for you today is that in every area of your life, especially in the areas where you're lacking, you're on empty, and you're desperate, let God in, **let him have it, let him show you that even you have nothing, he has everything!**

A Grateful Meal

We have the opportunity this morning to receive the Lord's Supper. One of the names for this meal is the Eucharist, which means Thanksgiving. Let us take this meal together in thanks and in our lacking!

Hear these words:

1 Corinthians 11:23-30 (NIV)

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

Questions For Personal Reflection Or Group Discussion:

1. Can you think of one of the most generous things someone has ever done for you?
2. How has God been generous to you in your life, even recently?
3. What are some of your most cherished Thanksgiving traditions?

4. Have you lived with a “scarcity mindset”? Do you live with one now?
5. What sticks out to you about that story with the poor widow?
6. What are the areas of your life where your lack might be your opportunity to grow and give?

Readings For This Week

Monday, November 25: Deuteronomy 15:1-11

Tuesday, November 26: Matthew 25:31-46

Wednesday, November 27: Acts 4:32-5:11

Thursday, November 28: Acts 20:13-38

Friday, November 29: 2 Corinthians 9

Work Cited

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