

October 14, 2018 21st Sunday after Pentecost
Gratitude and Generosity Dialogue Sermon: Ann Wagner
Jay Carlson, Beth Ubbelohde, Eric Ringham, Pr. Jen Nagel

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, Psalm 90:12-17,
Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31

This sermon is a teamed effort. Below are crafted words for some, and notes for others.
These reflect the planning process. The sermon in each service was similar, though not the same.
The preachers adapted the content somewhat.
We recommend you listen to the audio to get a fuller effect of this dialogue sermon.

Jen:

May the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God. Amen.

Grace and peace, beloved ones of Christ Jesus.

This morning four members of our congregation's Gratitude and Generosity Team are teaming up as our preachers.

I give thanks to each of them: Ann Wagner and Eric Ringham, Beth Ubbelohde, and Jay Carlson.

A few years ago we created this new team to think about stewardship:

about the ways we celebrate and share the gifts we receive from God.

This new team promptly, and aptly, renamed itself the Gratitude and Generosity Team.

My role this morning is to ask the questions and then to step back.

So let's get to it:

Jen: First, let's talk about that Gospel that I read: How do you hear this gospel passage?

Beth:

This is a difficult text for me and I'm sure for many others as well. There is a tension here and I've always struggled with it. Jesus asks us to give up everything and follow Him, not only money and possessions, but family and loved ones too. That seems harsh to me. How can I do what He is asking? It's hard enough to give up money and possessions for which I have worked very hard, but I just couldn't walk away from my family, children and grandchildren.

Jay:

I basically think of myself as a generous person. But this passage raises the bar significantly to a whole new level of giving. I don't think I'd ever give up everything I own, but it does cause me to ask myself about what gets in the way of my being truly generous? I like my things, comforts. I want to maintain a sense of security for myself and my family for the future. Can I make generosity a priority even above comfort and security?

Ann:

Maybe it's just in this moment, act of kindness, speak for oppressed.

Eric:

Too often we hear this as a quid pro quo.

Maybe we can think about it differently:

Maybe it's not about giving and then getting, BUT maybe it's about letting go, having to let go, beginning to realize the blessings, more abundantly than otherwise aware.

Beth:

Letting go is a good point. When we hold on to our possessions and concentrate on keeping everything we have or accumulating more, it creates a lot of work. These material things have a hold over us. By letting go of earthly possessions we relinquish that hold which is very freeing. We are now able to expend that energy in new ways such as building relationships and community. I believe that is part of what Jesus is asking us to do when we follow Him.

Eric:

Recalling the way we ended our worship services during the summer.

Every Sunday we heard that passage from Micah that begins: What does the Lord require of us, but do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

The prophet Micah has a way of defining what our discipleship could be.

Micah speaks of justice, and mercy and walking humbly, like that's enough, but Jesus says... get over it, can give everything and still more to give.

Always a capacity for doing more than expect you can.

Jay:

I notice that Jesus invites the man to do two things: give up his possessions (which is exceptionally hard) but then to give the proceeds to the poor. Perhaps Jesus is pointing out that economic disparity creates barriers between people, barriers that go against God's intentions for us.

Giving up possessions and giving up the ways our wealth defines us allow us to be in greater relationship w/ other people. And it's through relationships that God's reign breaks into the world. Through relationships God brings healing and wholeness and new life.

Jen: Let's shift a bit. Here's another question: Why do we give to the church?

Jay:

Here's one example of why I give to the church. Last month, I was at a rehearsal for the ULCHers group. As we were packing up after rehearsal and getting ready to rush off, Ben the piano player paused and asked us, "So guys, how are things going in your lives?" It provided me an opportunity to talk about a big decision I was trying to make about whether to move forward with an interim pastor position at another congregation, and I found the conversation really helpful. Others talked about what was going on for them. And I think we had a conversation that doesn't take place in many other places. It's a gift to have a community of faith to talk about big decisions and struggles and joys.

A church community is unique. I also think about this in terms of why I want my kids to be part of a church. I love that by coming here my kids get to build relationships with adults who are not related to them but care about them. I think these relationships are crucial not only for faith formation but also for just generally raising healthy, compassionate kids.

Congregations are unique, and I believe they are one of the most important ways that God is at work in the world. I definitely believe that is true of this congregation, and it's important to me and Kristen to financially support the ministry here.

Eric:

Being member, financially committed to life of church and that means different things to different people, different commitment, AND richness we get to share in response to that.

Giving changes who we are.

We value what we pay for.

We become invested in the church through a lot of things, time, resources, talents, faithful observance and practice, but also it brings about a change in us.

Choir anthem:

Thou shalt know him when he comes.... Not by... But by the change Jesus accomplishes in you.

Can be explicit, all have times in our lives when the importance of church outweighs our ability to give to the church.

Maybe we're underemployed, unemployed, students, all know financial stress is real.

You can support the church in whatever way is available to you.... can support on behalf of that person you used to be, give when can and as able,

God's love is freely available to all. Jesus is with us and knows these experiences.

Supporting each other, that's what families do.

Ann:

Searching my whole life to find a church, never pledged, felt like this became my church family.

I believe in the mission of this congregation, pledging opened me up to it.

It changed me.

Jen-Conclusion

**What I hear each of you saying, and most truly, what I hear the Gospel saying,
is a message about discipleship.**

Seek the Lord and Live, as Amos puts it in the first lesson.

Be disciples.

Be disciples, even in the tension of honest money talk, in the agitation to follow more truly.

Today's gospel has an air of indictment, this group grappled with this as we prepared to speak.

But then, in the gospel, did you hear that lovely little line about how Jesus looked at the man and loved him?

That's the gospel I hold onto: **Even in the tensions, Jesus looks at the man, and loves him.**

Jesus looks at us, and loves us, calls us into relationship, into real, vulnerable, powerful discipleship.

I'm grateful that you four are willing to name the tensions, and I know there are still others.

Those tensions are real.

But the invitation is bigger, much bigger, and in it Jesus looks at us with love,
and invites us into this new way of being disciples.

Thank God for this courageous preaching team.

Our prayer is that this conversation and these stories help you to enter into this tension of how we are disciples.

Thank God for each of you,

a whole community, at once living with the tensions - in our text and in our world,

And always, always, held in the gaze of Jesus, who looks at us, and loves us.

Amen.