

Sermon ✝ July 17, 2022
Luke 10:38-42
Frank Maxwell

This morning we continue our sermon series, *My Faith Habits*, as we consider sharing resources; that is, our financial resources.

Now before you start sweating profusely or clutching your wallet or breaking-off all eye contact with me . . . what ever it is that you do when preachers talk about money . . . just relax. This is not about beating people over the head to give more money to church, it is rather an examination of developing a right attitude for sharing.

It was a rainy morning and he was in a small neighborhood restaurant for breakfast. His wife had recently left him and his faith in himself, other people and God was almost non-existent. There was no joy in his life. And, on this bleak morning, the atmosphere outside the diner was reflected in the silent, hunched shoulders of those who were eating or drinking coffee . . . each one seemingly locked into their own thoughts, their own lives.

Then a little girl, who was seated in a small booth with her mother, broke the terminal silence, "*Momma, why don't we say our prayers here?*"

The innocence of that loud comment spun the waitress around to look, and seeing the little girl, the waitress smiled and said, "*Sure, honey, we pray here. Will you say the prayer for us?*" And then the waitress turned to the other diners and said, "*Bow your heads.*" And they did!

And the little girl prayed loudly, "*God is great, God is good, and we thank him for our food. Amen.*"

Everything changed in that diner. People looked up and at one another and began to talk to each other. And the waitress, smiling, said, "*We should do that every morning.*" And the man? "*All of a sudden,*" he wrote, "*my whole frame of mind started to improve. From that little girl's example, I started to thank God for all that I did have and stopped majoring in all that I didn't have. I started to choose happiness.*"

(Adapted from "Leadership," Fall 1997, page 81)

Welcome to the heart of God. We are all part of creation—God's love expressed all around us. The heart of God can be found evident in any place—even a diner on a misty morning.

Christians believe that God did not have to create—but God's heart, God's love could not go unexpressed. So God spoke the word of love and creation happened. It is of the nature of God to love and, as we all know, love is not complete unless it is expressed.

All of creation you and me and little girls in diners—are expressions of God's love. And, of course, I know that we do not always feel that way. Sometimes we are like the other diners, or even the man in the story. Life can beat us up and leave us feeling abandoned beside the Jericho road of life. Or, life can just be drab ... as a friend of mine is fond of saying, "*Life is so daily.*"

But God's love continues coming our way . . . the Holy Spirit is God's love continuing — in us and around us. The Holy Spirit is God's surprising heart awakening within us or meeting us through those around us. And we in the Church have been especially blessed with this wonderful news we call the Gospel and the continuing love of God.

Before we can share our resources . . . we've got to examine our hearts. So ... what's in your heart?

In the Second Corinthian. letter, St. Paul speaks of the gratitude that moved the churches of Macedonia in these words, "*They gave as much as they could afford and even more, simply because they wanted to. They even asked and begged us to let them have the joy of giving their money for God's people.*" (2 Corinthians 8:3-4)

Their gratitude was abundantly evident in what they did in their giving. Reflecting God's heart, they overwhelmed St. Paul with their eagerness to give. That's what that man in the diner discovered.

The keys for exercising generosity include to begin where you are. There are always reasons to put off joyous lives of gratitude evident in generosity . . . but there are no good reasons for it. Gratitude and generosity change us from the inside out—even our blood chemistry changes as well as our attitude. We are blessed by our opportunity to give back.

Margaret "Maggie" Evenson was a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Fort Atkinson. Maggie's life had not always been easy. She and her husband owned a small farm on the west side of Cambridge, Wisconsin . . . right on Highway 12. They had one son. One day, when he was about 10 years old, he got off the school bus and was so anxious to get the mail from the mailbox across the road that he ran directly in front of the school bus as it was moving forward. It was not the bus driver's fault. He died instantly. It was just a few years later that Maggie's husband died. She lost the farm and moved to Fort Atkinson. For the remainder of her days, Maggie lived in subsidized government housing. Her only income was her monthly \$400 social security check. Whenever we had a church dinner or coffee hour, Maggie always brought incredible cookies and cakes. She volunteered for all and any activities at church . . . always with a smile on her face. And every Sunday morning, without fail, Maggie placed a \$10 check in the offering plate.

And every year, when we sent out a stewardship letter asking people, if they were able, to increase their giving Maggie always showed up in my office and apologized for not being able to do more. Time and time again, she would tell me with a big smile on her face, "*God has so richly blessed my life. I'm sorry that I can't do more.*" And every year, I thanked

her for her incredible generosity, gave her a big hug and thanked God for her presence in my life.

St. Paul also tells us to sow abundantly. Again, in 2nd Corinthians, “. . . *the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*” Let us be clear. God's loving arms will embrace you and me no matter how we sow. And the good Lord knows, we are facing some tough economic times.

When it comes to talking about sharing our financial resources, I have never tried to encourage people by relying on guilt . . . it doesn't work. All that I can ever do, is tell the story.

We are those who have been held in the arms of God's grace. We know the joy of our faith because we know the heart of God in Jesus Christ. But there are many who do not know or, because of life circumstances, have forgotten.

How shall they know if our joy is not extended to them in gratitude to God for what we have already received? Sharing our resources enables us to be a part of God's arms to embrace a broken world in Jesus' name.

We cannot out give God—because God has already given us the Savior.

What we can do is participate in sowing the love of God in our world through our generosity . . . because God has been so generous to us.