



Pastor Robyn Hogue

## Sunday's Sermon

# The Joy of Living Generously

Isaiah 55:1-5 and II Corinthians 9:6-15

October 22, 2017

Skyline Presbyterian Church

As your pastor, I want to help you connect your faith with your money and to let go of the messages of fear, guilt and anxiety that surround the intersection of those two topics. I want you to know that I flat out don't agree with what gets called the "prosperity gospel," which basically presents having more money as a sign of God's favor, therefore, making having less money a sign that a person is not doing something right. I also believe that conscientious and compassionate use of our money in a world where people spend \$310 million on costumes for their pets and \$5 billion on entertaining ringtones for their phones is not an easy task. The temptation to spend now and think later (or never!) will always be with us, but with prayerful intention and lives tuned to Jesus, we can slow down and reflect on what we earn or receive in retirement, how we spend it, who is affected by it, and what it says about us as Christ followers.

Our theological truth is everything comes from God—our bodies, our relationships, our minds, our days on this earth, even our ability to accomplish the goals we set and the motivation to set them in the first place. We are not owners of these things, but managers of what God has entrusted to us. We got it right when we sang these words in a hymn last week:

We give Thee but Thine own  
whate'er the gift may be.  
All that we have is Thine alone,  
a trust, O Lord, from Thee.

Once you say yes to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior all that you have and all that you are – it belongs to the Lord.

Even our offering to God is a response to God's prior offering to us—the countless blessings we've received—and, most especially, the offering of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins. We love Jesus, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19) In much the same way, we give because God has first given to us.

The story is told of a father took his little boy to a baseball game. On the way into the stands, he bought a package of peanuts and gave them to his son. As the game got underway, he asked if he could have a peanut. The little boy clutched the bag tightly and said, "No! They're mine!" The father said, "O.K., I was just hoping you'd want to share." The little boy thought for a moment, then held out the bag and said, "You can have some, Dad." The father took a peanut and put his arm around his son and said, "You know, it's really not about peanuts."

Here's how it is: The Lord gives to us, and we give back to God as we give to others. We're created to be channels of God's grace and love. As long as we understand ourselves to be channels, not containers, the blessings flow freely. In fact, the more we give, the more freed up we are. It's when we start holding out and stop giving ... You know how it is—When you start thinking of our money as that which *you've earned*, or that which *you deserve*, and that which *you need to hold on to* ... that the problems begin. I've said this before, but it bears repeating: The Lord not only gives us what we have, but gives us the ability and the motivation to have it.

Sure, it takes work to get ahead. It takes effort on our part along with perseverance and a willingness to make sacrifices, but these are all part of the gift. In school, it's the students who put in the effort who benefit the most. It's the employee who works for a promotion who gains the respect of the peers.

But our problem is, having put in the time and effort to succeed, we make the mistake of thinking that money that comes from these successes are ours to enjoy, not God's gifts to share with others. Only as we make a connection between our resources and God's blessings will we ever be free to give gifts to others without expecting a gift in return. I invite you to cultivate an attitude for offering our gifts to God that is not guilt or fear or any form of obligation or coercion, but humility, gratitude and an increasing sense of joy.

Over the years, I've heard well-meaning saints say some pretty terrible things about why we ought to give to the church. Here's one example:

"Now folks, we all know it takes a lot of money to keep the doors of the church open, and there are only so many of us, so it's important for everyone to do his part."

This is your basic country club approach: You add up all the expenses and divide them by the number of members, and you have what each one is expected to pay. There's nothing wrong with it. It's just that this is not what it means to make an offering to God.

Neither is this, spoken by another well-meaning saint, who stood before the congregation with hands on his hips and said:

"There are some of you sitting out there today who aren't paying your fair share, and you know perfectly well who you are!"

This is the guilt and shame-on-you approach, and it has nothing to do with making an offering to the Lord. What you give to the Jesus through our church ought to be given of your own free will and not forced in any way. Paul told the Christians in Corinth when he asked them to make an offering to help the Christians in Jerusalem,

"Let us give according as we have determined in our hearts;  
not grudgingly, or under compulsion;  
for God loves the joy of a giver." (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

Let's be clear: We don't pay dues. We're not assessed for our share of the expenses. We're not taxed in any way.

And we don't take even up a collection. Did you know that? We receive an offering. There's a big difference: A collection is a means of passing the hat to raise money; an offering is a means of praising God to show our appreciation for God's countless blessings. As we approach this important time in the life of our church, may we remember why we give: We give out of love and gratitude to God and out of love for each other.

Why we choose to give our money, our time, our abilities, our relationships and our creative energies is every bit as important what we choose to give. A Christ-centered theology of offering can help us be clear about why we give what we give. Mine is as simple as 1-2-3, and I invite you to make it yours, as well:

1. All that we have and all that we are belong to God. We have nothing to offer except what God has already entrusted to us to manage.
2. Our offering to God is a response to what God has given to us – the countless blessings we've received – and, most especially, the offering of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins. So that ...

3. We can cultivate a generous attitude for committing our gifts to God that is not guilt or fear or any form of obligation or coercion, but one of gratitude and a rising sense of joy.

To put it as succinctly as possible, “We joyfully offer our lives to God in gratitude to Him who died and rose again for us.”

Remember the little boy and his father at the baseball game? The same holds true for us: It’s really not about peanuts, it’s our relationship with The Giver.