



Living with Gratitude

“Living with Gratitude – Choose Life”

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, September 14-15, 2019

All Services

The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Grace and peace be to you from our
Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Welcome to worship this morning as our church goes into a sermon series called “Living with Gratitude.” We’re going to look at a lot of different themes; generosity, thankfulness, gratitude, leadership, service, reflecting on God’s blessings, stewarding our resources of time, talent and treasures.

And I think it is an important time in Trinity’s life for such a series. We are in the midst of a major capital campaign “*Honor our Past and Plan our Future.*” We’re preparing to vote on improvement projects based off of that campaign. We’re continuing to grow our congregation in membership and generosity for our work, to worship God, connect with God and others and to serve our neighbors in need.

But when we think of generosity, usually we begin to think about ourselves. If I am going to be generous what am I going to do with **my** stuff. Where do I want to put **my** money?

But in the Bible generosity always begins with God’s generosity. Because everything comes from God. The psalmist in Psalm 24 puts it this way, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.” God is the owner of all that is, because God is the creator of all that is.

He has created us, and he has provided for our needs, our daily needs rather than our wants or desires. And we are given gifts, each one of us. Some teaching, some preaching, some administration, some singing, some acts of compassion. . . and we use those gifts and we make a life for our families. We live a life of worship, connection and service. But never forget that it is God who is the source of all those gifts. God is the great giver.

The apostle Paul says that Jesus is the “king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God.” Bold statement about a bold God. Because it all belongs to God, so what we do with our stuff matters.

And our response to God's generosity matters. God wants us to focus on those things that really matter. Your intentions matter. Your attitude matters. Your deeds, what you decide to do matters.

In 28 years of ministry I have been blessed to have pastored some really generous people. My first congregation I think of Paul. Paul lived a pretty simple life, a difficult life you might even say. He would take one of those carts from the super market and go out into the streets of Queens Village and pick up the cans and all the bottles and then he would take them to the recycling center and get the money and then come back to church that Sunday and give the proceeds to the church.

I think of Ron who is a semi-retired investment banker in my second congregation. One Sunday after Christmas he came up to me and said, "Listen I want to give an extra gift to the church," and he handed me a check and I put it in my pocket and said thank you Ron, thank you very much. And at the end of the year sometimes those things happen, people just giving an extra gift at the end of the year. When I went back to my office to put the check away, I opened it up, it was a check for \$50,000.

And then there was our own member, a member of this choir, Jane Hess, who left the bulk of her estate to this congregation. Even left her house for our mission in ministry.

But I've also heard church people say that they won't support a program, or they won't support their congregation's budget, or needed property improvements because, well they don't like it, or they don't think that it is really going to benefit for them. Their heart just isn't in it.

Well, Jesus doesn't say, "where your heart is, there your treasures will be." In other words where your wants or desires are there is where you put your money. Instead he says both in Matthew and Luke, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

And in the church we make our financial commitment, we try to live gratefully and generously, not because we're getting something out of it, but because we are affirming our belief in God, the one who created us, the one who saves us, the one who put us together with each other in relationship in the church. We are in this life together, all of us as the church.

And quite frankly, that's why the offering is a part of every Christian worship service for the last 2000 years. It centers us on God and on his purposes for our lives. And so, we support the mission and ministry of our church because we love God. We give because we have a giving God who calls us to be like him, outrageously generous so that our hearts are connected with him.

I read a story of an old man giving advice to his younger son. He says to his son, "A fight is going on inside of me, it's a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf is good. He is joy, peace, love hope, serenity, humility, and kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. "He looks at his son and says, "that same fight is going on inside you."

The son thought about it for a moment and then he asked, "Well father, which wolf will win?"

The old man replied simply, "The one that you feed."

Intentions matter, attitude matters, deeds matter.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, writes in his letters his advice:

*"Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as you ever can."*

We give because we have a giving God who calls us to be like him, outrageously generous so that our hearts, minds, and souls are connected to him.

And if that's not enough, enough of a motivation, living with gratitude and generosity is actually good for you!

Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough in the *Psychology of Gratitude*, cite scientific studies that suggest developing a conscious practice of gratitude and living gratefully can strengthen your immune system, improve your sleep, and lower your blood pressure.

Gratitude is also connected to higher levels of positive emotions, more joy and pleasure, and increased optimism and happiness.

And finally, living gratefully helps make us more helpful, more compassionate, more generous, more forgiving, more outgoing, and reduces the feeling of loneliness and isolation.

Living with Gratitude and Generosity brings us life and it brings us life and a relationship that are so important to us. In short, it makes us happy.

Notice the number of times that "joy" and "rejoice" were in our gospel reading.

Our generous God seeks the lost, he never gives up on us. He seeks us out even when we're lost, because we are precious in his sight. And heavens rejoice when we are reunited with God and with his purposes.

So, I invite you this season to open up your hearts and your minds and Live with Gratitude. Focus on God, his generosity for us and for his purposes. It will give us joy and it will make us happy. And living with gratitude and generosity will give us life! Amen.

Copyright © 2019, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org