

The Walk: Give Sunday, 10/10/21

Last week we recognized that we are called to servant ministry, sacrificially serving others in the name of Jesus just as Jesus gave of himself for us. We were all created to serve, and so we all must continually ask the question, “Who or what am I serving today?”

Today we consider the Christian discipline of giving. Prayer and worship centers us in God’s presence, the study of God’s Word orients us to God’s will, and serving others is our participation in God’s plan for redeeming creation. Our giving accomplishes at least two things: enabling God’s ministry to the world; and taming our hearts that are so prone to idolize money and the things it promises to do for us.

Ecclesiastes is a strange book to the modern reader. It can sound downright hopeless and depressing! Would you bother to read any other book if it began in the same way? “Everything is meaningless...completely meaningless!”¹ But Ecclesiastes isn’t a cynical tirade by a disillusioned King. It’s wisdom, Godly wisdom granted to King Solomon, who was said to have received “a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have!”²

In the passage we heard this morning, Solomon addressed the meaninglessness of hedonism, the single-minded pursuit worldly pleasures. Laughter, alcohol, a large home, beautiful gardens, servants, the massive accumulation of wealth, the pleasures of the flesh, and even the satisfaction of work well done Solomon found meaningless apart from a proper relationship with God. It is, he said, like chasing the wind. Or to use a more modern simile, it’s like running around and around on a wheel like a gerbil, never making progress no matter how fast we run. Most of us know that in our heads, but do we know it in our hearts? Do we show it in our behavior?

I invite you to do an honest self-assessment. Fill in the blank. “If only {blank} I would be happy.” How would you answer that? If only I could afford a new car? If only I could get a better job? If only I could have another drink? If only I could place another bet? If only I had a partner? If only I could upgrade my phone/wifi/router/tablet/desktop/smart

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:2. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

² 1Kings 3:12. Ibid.

TV/doorbell/thermostat, or some other technological marvel, I'd have what I need and be happy?

It's not the having of things that's a problem for us. It's that we look to them for our meaning instead of God and believe the lie that they can make us happy. But God has a better plan, if only we'll train our hearts to believe it and act accordingly. Jesus gave us the key in our next reading from the Gospel of Matthew. I'm reading in the sixth chapter, beginning with verse 19, in the New Living Translation. [{Read Matthew 6:19-24, 33 NLT}](#)

I was thinking about moths and rust and thieves and wondering what some modern equivalents would be. What are the things that most threaten the things we look to for our security and happiness? Unemployment, disability, divorce, stock market crashes, pandemics, house fires, mold in the walls, flooded basements, getting old, getting cancer? We know that our material possessions and even our human relationships are transitory, but we tend to imagine they'll last forever. Adam Hamilton notes the irony of the term, "Amazon Fulfillment Center,"³ as if anything Amazon can sell and ship to us can really bring us deep and lasting fulfillment, no matter how quickly it's delivered to our doorstep.

Jesus warned us about the trap of valuing these things above the eternal things of God, saying quite plainly, "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money."⁴ His solution is equally concise: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and [God] will give you everything you need."⁵ Living into that solution, on the other hand, requires the discipline of a lifetime.

So how can we find true meaning in life, grow in our giving, and avoid becoming enslaved to money and our possessions? There's a reason we keep circling back to the theme of gratitude. Gratitude is a core Christian discipline that guards our hearts against idolatry and greed and frees us to be more cheerful givers. Gratitude is the art of "learning to want what you already have" which in turn comes from the practice of "giving thanks for what

³ Adam Hamilton. *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, p. 94. Abingdon (2019).

⁴ Matthew 6:24. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

⁵ Mathew 6:33. Ibid

you already have.”⁶ So instead of saying, “If only I had {blank} I’d be happy,” the grateful heart says, “I am so thankful that I have {Blank}.” How would you complete that sentence? “I am so thankful that I have {Blank}.” What are you thankful for today?

I’ve told you before that our confirmation teacher, Jan Heyerdahl, challenges the class to be grateful, saying “Imagine waking up one morning and finding that the only people and things that you have in your life are those you remembered to thank God for the day before?” For some reason that’s really lodged in my heart, and I often think about it as I pray. Adam Hamilton notes that gratitude for what you have allows you to “possess your possessions rather than your possessions possessing you.”⁷

A second discipline that’s required to find meaning and grow in giving is that of living purposefully. Purpose is like a compass that directs our movement. Nobody needs a compass if they never intend to go anywhere. This seems to be what Jesus was getting at when he told us to “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously.”⁸ It’s impossible to “seek” without actively looking. That’s why I’m asking you to set goals for growing in worship and prayer, study of God’s Word, serving God and others, giving, and sharing. Spiritual growth seldom happens by accident.

Not only do we need intentionality to live purposefully, we need the right purpose. You may have a carefully constructed daily plan to fulfill your purpose of streaming everything that Netflix is currently offering, but that’s a purpose with little redeeming value and no eternal worth. That’s the kind of purpose that could sabotage rather than support the goal of growing in giving. The only enduring purpose worth living for is revealed to us in the life of Jesus, which he summed up for us as loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Learning that amounts to nothing if we aren’t intentionally leaning into those teachings in our attitudes and choices every day. We need to know God’s purpose and then do God’s purpose.

A spirit of generosity is the last key to finding meaning and growing in our giving. That means more than leaving a good tip to your server at a restaurant, although that’s a

⁶ Adam Hamilton. *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, p. 94. Abingdon (2019).

⁷ Ibid, p. 96.

⁸ Matthew 6:33. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

good starting place. Generosity begins by recognizing that we serve a generous God and we were made in God's image. That means we were created to generously offer blessings to all of God's creation. That's a core purpose that we find in Genesis 12:3, where God said to Abraham, "All the families on earth will be blessed through you."⁹ We are all blessed to be a blessing, generously blessing others in recognition of the many ways we've been blessed by God.

Last month you received a Promise of Giving card in the mail. We call this a "Promise" rather than an "estimate" because this isn't just an exercise in math, but a covenant for spiritual growth. Regular, intentional giving encourages us to practice those three things we just talked about: Gratitude, purpose, and generosity. Let your promise of giving for 2022 reflect your gratitude to God. Let your promise reflect your purpose in life as a seeker of God's Kingdom. And let your promise of giving reflect a spirit of generosity, generously giving to the work of God out of the abundance God has given you.

You can mail in that card any time, but I encourage you to do that within the next two weeks as we continue to forecast our ministry budget for 2022. You can also make your promise of giving online. Just go to the homepage of our website and look for the image of the highwire walker.

I can't tell you how much to give, either to our church or other benevolences. But I can tell you that regular, intentional giving is a core component of growing in your faith and fulfillment in life. I strongly endorse proportional giving, which is giving that is expressed as a percentage of what you've received. It's a beautiful plan, because the amount you give changes with the amount you receive, either up or down. I also encourage you to consider our automated Electronic Funds Giving Program. Jana and I use that and find that it helps us so much with maintaining our regular pattern of giving. Whatever and however you give, let it be offered with gratitude and joy, remembering the words of Winston Churchill, who said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."¹⁰

Please take some time now to reflect on how you'll grow in giving.

⁹ Genesis 12:3. Ibid

¹⁰ Adam Hamilton. *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, p. 101. Abingdon (2019).



609 8th St NW • Buffalo, MN 55313
(763) 682-3538 • www.buffaloumc.org

Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com