

## “*Shared generosity*”

November 8, 2009

Text: *Mark 12:41-44, 2 Corinthians 8:1-7*

### I.

Well, friends, it’s Stewardship Sunday and there’s a lot to be excited about. To begin with, I’m excited to be back in South Florida. We had a great time in France and England: France, to find a place to live for our planned 14 weeks in France during my Sabbatical leave beginning in mid April of 2010; and England, of course, to see our first grandchild, the precious, little ten week old Annika.

But I’m also excited about Stewardship Sunday ... a time when we come together to share our abundance with God ... a time when we’re reminded of the cost and joys of Christian discipleship.

The great thing about Stewardship Sunday is that our Stewardship—our *giving back* to God—is something we do together. In our Stewardship, we stand with one another in the financial support of our church. We’re in this together. It’s a *together* thing.

As we reflect on our Christian Stewardship this morning, we’re reminded that our Stewardship is an opportunity to be generous. Actually, this is one of the most biblical says to look at Stewardship, as an opportunity to be generous. *Generosity* is one of the quintessential Christian values. It’s an expression of our love, our dedication and so much of the best that is in our spirit.

When we’re baptized into the body of Christ that is the Church—when we become Christians—we’re signing up for a new way of life. It’s a way of life defined by love and kindness and forgiveness ... and also by generosity.

Christians, naturally, *want* to be generous. When we’re *alive to the promises of God*, we can’t help but be generous. We want to be generous because we want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. We want to make a difference in the world ... and certainly we want to be good stewards of all God has given us.

And the KEY to all of this is *shared generosity* ... each of us doing our fair share in the support of our church.

### II.

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul was encouraging and emphasizing in the reading I just shared from 2 Corinthians 8. What this was about was a special offering Paul was taking for the Jerusalem Church, the mother church back in Jerusalem that was led by Peter, James and John (the *pillars*) ... but a church which was also notable poor.

Because Paul was not one of the twelve original disciples (he never knew Jesus in the flesh), it was important to him, as an expression of solidarity with the mother church, to take up this offering—known as *the Jerusalem Collection*.

He wanted to symbolize that they were ONE CHURCH ... each of them committed disciples of the living Christ. Paul wanted very much for each of his churches—the churches he helped to found—to do their fair share in giving to this Collection.

And so Paul is writing to the Corinthians encouraging them to be eager and generous participants in this special offering. Again, he wants them to do their share. In this 8<sup>th</sup> chapter that I shared with you, he's telling them how the churches in Macedonia—the church at Philippi and Thessalonica—had given so sacrificially to the offering.

*Out of their poverty, they have given, Paul says. Their abundant joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a **wealth of generosity** on their part.*

And so what he is striving for is a sense of *shared generosity* from the Corinthians. And that's our goal for us in our church as well. SHARED generosity, each of us doing what we can—our part—in the support of our church.

### III.

What's this about? It's about everybody doing their fair share. People of faith can relate to that. That was the model in the early Christian communities that began to emerge soon after Jesus' death and resurrection ... when the believers felt this *presence* of the living Christ among them.

From Acts 5, check it out! *Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul ...and they didn't covet their possessions but, rather, shared them with one another. And going on ...*

*And great grace was upon them all ...and there was not a needy person among them.*

When each one of us does our fair share, everybody wins. The church prospers, the people prosper ... the sense of community deepens. It's what church life and our Christian faith are about.

Keep in mind, friends, if you attend here, we're you're church.

- We're not just the Church Council's church ... or the choir's church ... or Women's Fellowship's church and certainly not just the minister's church. We're not just any one person or group of people's church; we're everyone's church.
- If you come to church here ... if this is where you meet God and choose to live out your Christian faith, we're you're church. And if we're your church, what we're asking you to do is to make a commitment.

This is not about how much you give; it's about making a commitment of *whatever* you can give. I know that many of us are going through hard times. Some of us have even lost our job during the last couple of weeks. I know there is always the tendency to look at life more in terms of what we don't have rather than what we have.

But again, this is not about *how much* we give; it's about making a commitment.

#### IV.

In this same vein, in recent years, our Church Council and I have been talking about how we want our church to be a *high commitment* church ... where—no matter our life circumstances, our other commitments and realities we have to deal with—we're committed to our church. We're not just treading water on the sidelines, dabbling in this and dabbling in that, but never really committed.

We understand that after you first begin attending, you need your space—time to sort things out and decide if our church is the place where God's spirit touches your life and where you want to continue to live out your faith journey. The point is, once you make a choice that we're your church, commit to it.

Now that doesn't mean you're necessarily here every week. You're here when you can be here; but whether we're here or not, we're committed.

What we're asking each of us to do today is to make a commitment; make a pledge for 2010. That's why we're finishing the service over in Fellowship Hall with a special observance: to symbolize that this is a *shared* endeavor. We're all in this together.

Get this: for our church to have the future we want it to have. For us to continue to offer the ministry we offer with all of our programs, commitments to Christian outreach and with our personal touch and emphasis on relationships, we have to each do our fair share, much like the Apostle Paul asked his churches to do for the Jerusalem Collection.

In a high commitment church, everyone makes a commitment. That's been the focus of our Stewardship drive for 2010 and that's what we're asking you this morning.

Hey, we can all give something. Whatever it is, God will bless it and it will be a blessing for us as well.

#### V.

In our reading from Mark on the widow's special offering, what's important is giving out of whatever we have, no matter how much or how little.

If you have never made a pledge to a church before, today is the day to start. Start somewhere—wherever it is: \$1, \$5 or \$10 per week, \$15 or \$20 ... whatever God lays upon your heart. But again, the important thing is to give something ... to DO your part.

And then, as the years unfold, you can begin to raise your pledge—as many people do—year by year until you are pledging on a level you feel is commensurate with your income and reflective of your faith commitment.

A pledge is NOT a contract. It is a commitment; but commitment is a good thing because that's what Christians do. We commit. The pledge you make is between you and God and if you choose, later, to adjust it up or down—depending on your financial circumstances—that, too, is between you and God.

The only thing you will ever receive from the church with regard to your giving is a record of what you have given—both as a reminder, to help you know where you are in your giving, and for tax purposes. That's it.

But what a pledge does is it expresses your commitment and it gives you a built-in discipline to do your fair share for the financial support of our church. The flat-out truth is that people who pledge give more. They don't just give based on when they attend church; they give based on a commitment.

## VI.

I want to finish up with these words of inspiration from 1 Timothy 6 where Timothy urges us, each one ...

***To do good, be rich in good works, and be generous and ready to share ... And in this way store up for yourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so you may take hold of the life that really is life.***

That's my wish for each of us, friends: that we ***take hold of the life that really is life.*** That we be generous, each of us doing our fair share in the support of God's church; that God's purposes might continue to be realized both in us and through, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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