

Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 25—Year A
Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17
I Thessalonians 2:1-8
Matthew 22:34-46

This week, we're continuing our reflection on stewardship and giving. Quite honestly, I thought the people who shared last week—Karl and Amy and Lynne at the 8:00 service and Adam, Celeste, Charley, Elizabeth, and Pete at the 10:30 service—I thought *they* knocked it out of the park! As I listened to them, I got choked up and almost couldn't introduce the next person to talk. They gave a powerful witness as to *why the practice of giving* is important to them and *why supporting St. Luke's* is a priority for their family. They spoke of motivations stemming from **love and gratitude**. They spoke of **this community as family**. They spoke of the **important work that is done in this place and through this place**. They spoke of a **sense of responsibility**. They spoke from a **wide range of perspectives, life stages, and circumstances**. And **the theology of giving**, *the why of it*, well, it was a **solid** as any stewardship sermon I've ever heard, and I am quite confident that I will not improve upon it this morning.

So, I want to pull out to the 20,000 foot view and offer a few reflections. I still think that Lynne Twist's *The Soul of Money* is the best book out there when it comes to *reflecting spiritually on money*. She makes a statement that I come back to again and again—“*The **opposite of scarcity is not abundance; the opposite of scarcity is enough.***” And she tells story after story, from every corner of the world and from every economic level to back up this bold statement.

But “*enough*” is a really relative term. I may have *enough*, but if you are struggling to make ends meet, if you are one car repair away from not making it, one medical bill away from bankruptcy, to say “*there is enough*” may hit your ears as a total statement of *privilege*. *So, let's own that up front. Across our society, across our world, within our own parish, there are enormous economic inequalities—some have an overabundance while others do not have enough.*

In the big, big picture, *there is enough*. God made this creation and has filled it full with *enough*. The whole *manna* story is that **each family is given enough for the day**, their **daily bread**, and **when it's all weighed in the balance, it's the same**, because the *measure isn't a competition* based upon the most or the least, but simply, “*What is enough?*” In God's vision for this world, *there is enough for all* to obtain their **daily bread**. The **problem** isn't that there *isn't enough*; the **problem** is one of *attachment*; the **problem** is one of *hoarding*, good old-fashioned *greed*. The **problem** rests in our *inability to release*; the **problem** lies in *flow*. The **problem** isn't a *material* one; it's a *spiritual* one.

I fear I don't have *enough*, won't have *enough*; I fear that there isn't *enough*, and so I *hold on* to whatever I've got for dear life. I *grasp* after whatever I think I can get, and all of this *holding* and *grasping* keeps *our fists clenched* and *our minds constrained* and *our hearts bound up tight*. **There is no freedom here, and nothing is able to flow**. Our cultural message is one of *scarcity*. Everything in every aspect of our life right now is presented to us as a *zero-sum game*—winners and losers. Everything is trying to sweep us into a place of believing that our chief responsibility is to “*me and mine.*”

It was Lynne Twist who first helped me to understand *currency as current*, money as *energy that flows*. She speaks of what opens up in us and in our lives and in our world when we allow resources to *flow through* our lives. Richard Rohr reminds us that *sin is stopping the flow of love*. Nothing good comes when we *stop the flow*, be it in our loving or in the resources we are given to steward. When we *stop the flow of love*, we get *sick* and fall *out of harmony* with our *neighbor*. When we *stop the flow of resources*, *gross inequities* result that leave some *soul-sick with affluenza*, as one person aptly named it, and others *dying*, literally, from *lack of their daily bread*.

So, giving is that spiritual practice that keeps us aligned with the flow, that *practice* that reminds us that “*all that we are and all that we have*” are gifts from God, freely given as part of the *divine flow of love*. The *practice of giving* reminds us that *our love is meant to flow*, that *our material blessings are meant to flow*, and that *freedom comes* when our *hearts and minds and spirits and hands are open, gratefully receiving and generously passing along*.

And it is PRACTICE, because the culture is telling us otherwise. The culture is bombarding us with *scarcity* and *lack* and *zero-sum equations*. But here, in this place, we hear otherwise.

Where else do we come to learn that **the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart and mind and spirit and that the second us like unto it: to love our neighbor as ourself**? Who else teaches us **the radical nature and demands of this love**? Who else teaches us that **our neighbor is inextricably a part of my own being**, and who else teaches us that **neighbor always includes those most “other” from myself**? Where else can we go to find our way through all the distractions and questions that just don’t matter **to get down to the heart of the matter and the questions that do matter**, the questions of **salvation**, the questions of our **wholeness**, the questions that revolve around **living a life aligned with the glory of God that made us and lives in us and claims us as beloveds** and teaches us to **see that same glory in every human being that we meet, in every aspect of creation that we experience**.

You’re either giving and flowing OR your holding and clinging, it really is that simple. But all of this begs the question about *how much* to give and *where* to give. And to answer those questions, I can only invite you into the wrestling.

There are **seasons of life when our giving is more in the realm of our time and talents than our resources**—if **this is where you are, claim that and know it’s enough**. If you are able to **contribute financially**, the *how much* question is always a place of wrestling. One person spoke last week of the traditional 10% tithe—10% of gross income as a goal and a goal that took that individual years to meet. One of our elders stopped me at the door with a smile and a twinkle in their eye, and said, “*And nobody says you have to stop when you reach 10%*.” One household may be giving 15%, but still be in a posture of *grasping and holding*. Another household may be giving sacrificially at 2% and totally be living in *the freedom of the flow*. *Each household has to discern where the stretch needs to be to keep their hands and hearts freed up and open*. *Each household has to sort out where that place is that keeps them grounded in gratitude and generosity*. *Each household has to determine what their practice needs to be that will help them stand firm against the tide of attachment that would sweep all of us away*.

And then there is the question as to *where* to give. My answer is simple, give where you see God’s work being done, and know that all of those places where you give are a part of your *tithe* (and *tithe* is just a shorthand way to talk about a giving practice).

For our family, St. Luke's receives 90% of our total giving. We give here for all those reasons I talked about earlier—this is the place that teaches us **how to love in the radical way of Jesus** and shows us what that actually looks like in our flesh and blood lives; this is the place that **renews our spirits through the worship** we share every week together; this is the place that **surrounds us with companions** for our journey through life; this is the place that **gives us channel after channel through which our love can keep on flowing** out into the world.

It takes about **\$350,000 annually** to make this place go—to create all that **replenishes us Sunday by Sunday** and all that **forms us in the way of Jesus** and all that **equips us for service** and **gets channeled into the wider world** and all that helps us **coordinate and administer** such a complicated endeavor and all that helps us **care for this beautiful sacred space** that truly is sanctuary, *not just for us, but for the wider community, as well*. \$350,000 is no small amount, but this is no small mission that we've been given.

We can't do all that we do without your support. As I said last week, it takes all of our **offerings of time, large and small**; it takes all of our **offerings of resources, large and small**; it takes all of our **gifts, known and hidden**, to live as the Body of Christ that God calls us to be. Together, we get 'er done, and *that together* asks all of us to do *something*. *That something that is yours to do, well, figuring that out, that's the wrestling that has to happen between you and God.*

We live in a time that needs the church to be the church more than at any time I can remember. The currents are swift and strong out there, and this place **anchors** us, gives us **sanctuary**, **shapes** us, and then **sends** us back out to be those **repairers of the breach that Isaiah spoke** of long ago, **sends** us out to be **ambassadors of reconciliation that Paul knew the followers of Jesus to be**, **sends** us out to be **the hands and feet and eyes and ears and mouth of Christ**, **healing and making whole** all that is broken and wounded and forgotten and torn.

Over the next few weeks you will get a letter with a commitment form and worksheets to assist you in sifting through your situation. You will get an email with the information we shared in the Cottage Meetings, as well as links to videos from your brothers and sisters talking about *why they love St. Luke's* and *why they give*. **Sit** with these materials and **pray**. **Invite** God to show you what is being asked of you in the coming year, and then **respond**, knowing that **your commitment**, no matter it's shape, no matter it's size, is **one more channel for God's love and blessing to flow**.

So, let the wrestling begin, and may your wrestling be blessed as you join God in the *practices* that will set you free. Amen.

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