

Gracious Goodness
Exodus 16:2 – 4,13 – 21; Matthew 20:1 – 16
Sunday, August 18, 2019

We have spent this summer looking at the fruit of the Spirit. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians that if we are living our lives according to the Spirit of God, desiring the things of the *Spirit* rather than the things of the *flesh*, then our lives will be characterized by love and joy and peace and patience and kindness. And this week we add to that list *generosity*; that if we are living our lives according to the Spirit of God, our lives will be characterized by generosity to our neighbors.

Now, when you hear the word generosity, I would bet that the first thing we associate that with is *money*; that we are called to give our money and be generous with our money. But that's only *part* of the picture. Money is only one of the things that we are called to be generous with. There's a whole lot more. There are ways in which we can be generous with our *food* and our *time* and our *abilities*, with our *words*, with our *forgiveness*, with our *love*. Because even if someone does not have any money, they don't have a penny to their name, they can *still* be generous. Generosity does not depend on what we *have*...it depends on *who we are*. And there are plenty of people who *have it all*, but they are *not* generous.

If I asked you what the opposite of *generosity* is, what would you say? It's easy to say that the opposite of generosity is *selfishness*; instead of giving to others, you *keep* for *yourself*. We could say that the opposite of generosity is *greed*; that instead of giving to others, we get *more* and *more* for ourselves.

But *why* do we keep for ourselves? What motivates us to get more and more for ourselves? I think that the *root* of selfishness and greed, the thing that motivates us to be selfish and greedy, is

fear. Because generosity comes from a place inside us that trusts that there is enough to share. But *fear* comes from a place that says, “Maybe there *isn't*. Maybe I should get *more*. Maybe I should stash a little away. Maybe there’s *not enough*.” The opposite of generosity is *fear*. And we see that at work in our reading from Exodus.

The people of Israel have been set free from slavery in Egypt where, even though they were *slaves*, they had plenty of food. Now they’re out in the wilderness, and they have nothing. So they start complaining. God *hears* their complaints and says, “I will give you meat in the evening, and I will rain down bread from heaven in the morning, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. Don’t take *more* than you need. Just enough for that day. On the sixth day, you should gather *twice* as much, two days’ worth, so that you can take the seventh day off.”

So the people get up in the morning and find that God has indeed provided them with bread. Moses tells them, “Gather as much as you need for today,” and he tells them exactly how much to take. But some of the people gathered *more*, which left others with *less*. But, it says, when they got back, those who gathered *more* had nothing over, and those who gathered less somehow had as much as they needed. God evened it all out. Some people didn’t eat all of theirs. They kept it for the next day, because they were worried, they were afraid, they didn’t know if God was going to provide *more* bread. And the next morning, they found that what they had kept had gone bad.

They did this every day for 40 years, and over time they learned to *trust* that God would give them what they needed to live each day. And that’s what *we* are invited to hear in this story, too.

That God will give us what we need to live each day. Maybe not everything that we *want*, but what we *need* to live and do what God is calling us to do.

Now, we *hear* that, and it *sounds* good, but there's a part of us that says, "There are some people – *a lot* of people – who *do not* have enough. People without *homes* or *healthcare* or *any* money. Around 25,000 children in the world will *die of starvation* today. Where's *their* manna from heaven? Why doesn't God provide what *they* need to live?" But what if God *has*, and like some of the Israelites in this story, we have taken more than we *need*, leaving others with *less*?

I saw a study that said in order to provide every single person in the world with water and basic nutrition and medical care, it would cost around \$30 billion. Americans spend almost *ten times* that amount each year on *fast food*. Americans represent about 5% of the world's population, and yet we consume almost *half* of the world's resources.

And some people say, "We worked *hard* for it. We *earned* it. We *created* and *developed* most of those resources, so we *should* be entitled to use them." The people of Israel felt that way, too. After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, right before they arrive back home in Israel, God stops them and says in Deuteronomy chapter 8, "Do not say, '*My* power and the might of *my own hand* have gotten me this wealth. But *remember the Lord your God*, for it is *he* that gives you power to get wealth."

God has given us the ability to work hard. God has given us minds to come up with new ideas and new resources. God has given us talents and abilities that we use to make a living. All that we have, all that we are is only because God has *given* it to us. The clothes that you're wearing are a *gift*. The roof over your head is a *gift*. The food that you eat is a *gift*. That breath you *just*

took is a gift. And God is saying, “Don’t think that you’ve done all this on your own or that you’re somehow *entitled* to it. Remember who it came from and live in ways that are *grateful*.” Because our lives are a gift given out of the goodness and grace of God.

Jesus tells this parable about a wealthy landowner who goes out about 6 A.M. and hires some laborers to work in his vineyard. He agrees to pay them a certain amount for their work. Then he goes back out at 9 A.M. and hires some more. Then at Noon, he hires some more. And at 3 P.M., some more. And at 5:00, he hires some more and says, “Just give me a good hour of work.”

When it comes time to pay them, he pays them *all the same*; the ones who worked *one* hour get the same as those who worked *twelve* hours. Well, *that’s* not fair! If you’ve been working out in the hot sun, breaking your back all day long, and someone else just comes in and helps you *clean up* at the end of the day, shouldn’t you get *more* than *them*? So the workers complain to the landowner that this isn’t *fair*. But the landowner says, “I gave you what I said I would give you. Why do you care what I give *them*? It’s mine, and I can do with it what I want to. There’s enough for everyone.”

This parable is not about *fairness*. It’s about God’s *goodness* and *generosity*. *Grace* is not about getting what you *deserve*. It’s about getting what you *need* but you have done *nothing* to deserve, and it is given to you anyway, out of *love*, by God.

Both of these stories – manna in the wilderness and Jesus’ parable – are stories of God’s goodness and generosity and love. And if we are living according to the Spirit of God, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, that means we are living in ways that reflect God’s goodness and

generosity and love to others, ensuring that everyone gets not what we think they *deserve*, but what they *need* to *live* and be *whole* and feel *loved*. It's about God's goodness to *us*, and because we experience that generosity and love, we are good and generous and loving to *each other*, because we trust that God is going to provide us with everything we need to live, so we don't need to cling to what we have out of fear.

These stories show us that God *hears* complaints born out of fear and anxiety and injustice and hunger and lack, and God responds with grace and goodness and generosity. And the question for us is, will *we*? Will we hear the complaints and cries of our neighbors and respond in a way that provides for their needs?

Generosity is driven by our experience of the goodness and grace of God. God gives us what *we* need to live, so *we* can give to *others*. It's trusting that God will give us enough *time* to do what God needs us to do today, so we can take *this* piece of our time and give it to *this* person, without worrying that there won't be enough. God will give us enough *food* to eat, so we can take this *extra* food and give it to someone else, without worrying that there won't be enough. God has given us the ability to work and make money, and we have all that we need to live today, so we can take some and share it with someone who *doesn't* have enough. God has given us *forgiveness*, so we can take it and share it with someone who *needs* it. God has given us *love*, so we can take it and share it with someone who *needs* it.

Being generous means we trust in God's ability to provide, and we live *without fear*.

The other month we sent a group down to Puerto Rico on a mission trip, and when they came back, Libby Dalrymple told us a story about Paola, the woman whose house they were working

on. This is a woman whose home had been destroyed by a hurricane. She had lost so much. But each day, she prepared a meal for all the people who were there working on her house. She didn't have *much*, but she *trusted* that God would give her what she needed to live. And that trust made it possible for her to be *generous* with what she did have.

Jesus said, "Do not *worry* about your life, what you will eat or drink or what you will wear. Life is *more* than food and clothing. God takes care of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and God will take care of *you*. God *knows* what you need to live, and God is more than able to provide it." When we *trust* that God gives us what we need to live, then we can stop living out of *fear* that there won't be *enough*, and we can be *generous* with what we *do* have.