

# *“A Meditation on Stewardship and Generosity”*

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, I Corinthians 16:1-4,  
II Corinthians 8: 1-13, 9:6-15, Mark 9:38-50*

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*September 30, 2018*

From the Pulpit

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A baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Proper 21, September 30, 2018, dedicated to Abel Maverick Logel on his baptismal day, to the generous people of First Church and all those who are seeking to become more generous in their lives and always to the glory of God!

*“A Meditation on Stewardship and Generosity”*

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

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**Stewardship is about giving to God.** It is about turning total control of our lives over to God. It is about living the words of the Lord’s Prayer we speak each Sunday - and for many of us - many times during the week - “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” In other words, we want God’s reign in our life and God’s will for our life to become the guiding principle of our

daily living. (Drawn from Giving to God by Mark Allan Powell, Erdmann's Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 2006, p. xii).

Stewardship is about a prayerful and thoughtful attitude of sharing with others, which translates into the action of sharing. It is about sharing time, talents and financial resources. It is about living carefully and living well in relation to the earth and other people. Stewardship is about conserving water, recycling paper and aluminum, preserving wetlands and rain forests, rivers and water tables, exercising, eating right, managing stress, flossing our teeth, nurturing our relationships and marriages, raising happy and healthy children, caring for aging parents, as well as caring for the poor and oppressed in our city, state, nation and world. And yes, stewardship is about sharing and living into the life-giving message of faith in Jesus Christ. All of these - all of life lived well and joyfully for God - is central to stewardship.

Stewardship never happens by accident. We don't stumble into stewardship by showing up at church and suddenly become generous givers of our time, talents and financial resources. We also don't care for ourselves, God's creation or other people by accident. Stewardship is purposeful and thought out.

The Apostle Paul knew this as he was writing to the church at Corinth. He presents his faithful and principled teachings on stewardship at the end of his first letter and wraps it up in his second.

In First Corinthians....as a matter of fact, I Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul gives four directives for how to give to God in response to how God has given to you. First, your giving is an act of worship. In the week leading up to Sunday, pray over your gift and then present what you are giving to God. Second, your giving is systematic. Give when you are at worship and give regularly. Third, give you should give proportionately of your income. We cannot give what we don't have. But we can withhold what we have received. Giving a percentage of our income is important (I'll return to this). Fourth, plan your giving in advance. In other words, consider your gift and come ready to give.

Then in II Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, Paul continues with 10 more guides to giving, exhorting the church to follow the example of the people of Macedonia. His call echoes across time - first to the Corinthians and then through the ages - across the globe and through time all the way to First Congregational Christians on East Broad Street in Columbus, Ohio. We are called to follow the example of the magnificent Macedonians because they were remarkably generous people.

Like them, we are first and foremost called to **be graceful givers to God** (II Cor. 8:1). Out of the grace-filled attitude the rest of our giving flows (8:2). Second, **give voluntarily, not under compulsion** (8:3). Third, **give in proportion to your income and circumstances**, as each of us is expected to contribute according to our means (8:3, 11-13). Fourth, **give sacrificially because in so doing some us will be inspired to give beyond our means** (8:3). Fifth, remember that giving is a privilege, something we appreciate being able to do as a result of the grace of God working in our lives - so **give joyfully** (8:4). Sixth, since giving involves more than financial contributions, **give your whole being** as an example of total involvement and the vibrant faith and commitment God has placed on your heart (8:5). Seventh, **give as a witness to the gospel** demonstrating the genuineness of the church's love. (8:8).

He continues in the Ninth Chapter. **Give a pledge** for in your commitment and fulfill it over time because it shows your depth of commitment – **each person making up their own mind how much to give** (9:7). Ninth, **God will provide for cheerful givers**, so give out of the faith God has laid on your heart (9:8-11). Finally (10) – Remember that **Giving brings glory to God** and leads you to give thanks,

praise and glory to God (9:11-13). (Drawn from Mark Powell's book).

The generous people of a generous God look like this: They give with grace-filled extravagant generosity. Their giving is worshipful, systematic, proportional, planned, sacrificial and joyful. Generous giving reflects the entire being of the giver. Generous giving demonstrates a giver's involvement in the community, the vibrancy of their faith and exceptional commitment and in trust of God. Generous Giving is a witness to God's gospel of love, given purposefully over time, given out of faith in God and given in trust and confidence as a way to glorify God and praise the great steward of the universe and the great steward of each one of our lives.

**So, are you generous?** With whom are you generous? Some of us are generous with our family but not with our friends or other people. Some of us are generous with friends, but not family or other people. Few of us are generous is all times and places with all people. But, God is calling us all the time to generous throughout our daily walk with God. Each of us is called to be a Generous Steward. But, if you don't feel like a generous person, consider Generosity as a way to live your life. Generosity will change your life forever.

I have walked through 19 stewardship seasons with First Church. The last two years I have not preached or meditated at all on stewardship as we have held “silent” campaigns. In other words, in the “Silent” Campaign, I was silent and so was Rev. Corzine. As a result of my two-year silence, some of you have been saved from hearing my Mantra. But, as I close this brief meditation today, I invite you to hear my mantra (and repeat it with me). **“Poor Givers inspire poor giving. Good Givers inspire Good Giving. Great Givers inspire Great Giving.”** (repeat).

When we are poor givers we do nothing to inspire others (children included) and reflect the glory of God. When we give begrudgingly as “okay” givers, we end up having an okay church – with flatlined budgets, with no vision and a staff that never even sees even a cost of living increase, let alone growth and help in staffing or growth in any mission or ministry. So, Good Givers makes a good church but it is never one which aspires in any way to greatness. Great Givers makes for a great church and great mission and ministry.

What will your decision be? Will you choose to be a Poor Giver? A Good Giver? A Great Giver? This is not about the amount. It is about the heart. It is about the heart of the giver.

Remember, Stewardship and Generosity never happen by accident. We don't stumble into stewardship and generosity by showing up at church and suddenly become great givers. We also don't care for ourselves, God's creation or other people by accident. Such love and care is purposeful and thoughtful.

So, as we **"Awaken to what God is doing"** (our 2019 Stewardship theme), I invite you to be a generous steward of all that God has given you. I believe You will find heaven happening here and now as you grow in this God-blessed and beautiful way. Amen.

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