

A sermon delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, October 30, 2011, Reformation Sunday, dedicated to our stewardship team for this year, to William James Holton on his baptism into Christian faith, and always to the Glory of God!

“God’s Wondrous Gifts”

Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 23:1-12

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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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Generosity Works!

- 1. Generosity is Genius because it changes lives.*
- 2. Generosity connects us with others.*
- 3. Generosity helps us invest in what matters.*
- 4. Generosity frees our hearts.*

“Twelve Bright Ideas” about the Genius of Generosity:

- 1. To be smart, spend carefully. To be wise save, regularly. To be genius, give extravagantly.*
- 2. Where your money goes, your heart flows.*
- 3. Generosity is a gateway into intimacy with God.*
- 4. Stewardship is the path. Generosity is the adventure.*
- 5. Generous Givers make God and God’s purposes their*

highest priority.

6. Enjoy God's Generosity to you...and the share it with others.

7. Faith increases giving and giving increases faith.

8. Those blessed by God become blessers for God.

9. Generous living is joyful living.

10. God measures generosity not by the size of the gift but by the size of the sacrifice.

11. Generosity isn't an act, it's a way of life.

12. True generosity doesn't stop with possessions, it starts with them.

The Genius of Generosity, by Chip Ingram, published by Generouschurch, 2011, pp. 16-20, 96-97.

The Sermon Thoughts:

I. God's Wondrous Gifts - a stewardship celebration...

A. The Team of 12: Brian Cave, Kent Rambo, Cori Rowley, Cindy Conn, Kent Shimeal, Dr. Paul Leidheiser, Jr., Jim Griffin, John Matchett, Matt Meyers, Mary Day Fewlass, Neal Brower and Sandy Bennett.

1. A young team
2. An enthusiastic team
3. A talented team
4. A Prayerful team
5. A visionary team.
6. A team unafraid to try new ideas/ bright ideas.

B. They mailed out scriptural prayer cards - for you to receive each week and pray with. Thanks be to God for their leadership!

C. On-line Bible Study...

You shall love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-39).

If you sow sparingly, you reap sparingly....if you sow bountifully, you reap bountifully. (II Corinthians 9:6).

You received without payment, give without payment. (Matthew 10:8)

The measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Luke 6:38).

Honor the Lord with the first fruits of all your produce and your barns will be filled to plenty. (Proverbs 3:9-10).

They had generous hearts and shared all they had with others. (Acts 2:44-47).

The Story of the Widow's mite - She gave sacrificially - all she had. (Mark 12:41-44)

D. Jennifer Okezie Watts, Cori Rowley, Neal Brower, Paul Leidheiser, Jr. and of course Dr. Neela O-na-wa-le and Rev. Kate Huey who spoke openly with us about tithing. Dr. Wilson spoke beautifully about giving last week .

E. On September 25 - we stepped boldly forward into our future!

The Long Range Plan was passed overwhelmingly. But, to fulfill our dreams, visions, and goals, we will have to invest in our future.

The driving force in this plan is GROWTH, youth, children! JUST WATCH US GROW! Our growth begins today!

II. How do we grow and pay forward for our goals and visions?

A. Stepping up and being counted!

B. Our Stewardship Team - encouraged you to pledge on-line and through slow mail before we even got to this day . Thanks to those of you who responded early, as of Friday

morning - \$156,714 from 31 households of faith given for an average of \$3,072.82. That's a great start. We are going to need another 325 units at this current average - to reach our goals.

C. A Comprehensive two-year Compensation Study which the Personnel Committee has been working on indicates we pay most all our staff under median income. If we are going to change that, we all need to pay forward.

D. Stories -

1. This week in Birmingham...Sunday night.... Carolyn Maull McKinstry..... ***While the Whole World Was Watching The power of forgiveness.***

2. Yesterday....The Food Give Away/ The Central Southeast Association Meeting - showing leadership in Central Ohio for the hungry and the poor and for the Church of Jesus Christ!

III. We grow as we live our faith...

A. **I see it every day....** In your work (classrooms, hospitals, nursing homes, police and fire departments, on theatrical stages, law offices, restaurants, in work stalls and factory floors), in your homes, on the radio, in the papers, throughout central Ohio, in the compassion you show for others and for one another. God's Wondrous Gifts are alive in you!

B. **You absolutely amaze me!** I love you and adore you. I learn from you and grow in my faith because of you every day.

C. **In 20 days it will be 12 years since you called me to be your pastor - I am blessed to work with you and serve among you.**

D. **Dr. Washington Gladden** - 1902 at our Golden Jubilee - now in our 2011 Long Range Plan forevermore:

The work of the church is not yet done. The character of the

work has greatly changed...and the difficulties are somewhat increased...But there are people enough all about us who need the Gospel and no better place can be found for a church of Jesus Christ, a church ministering in His name to those who need Him most... To maintain it here will require of the members a little more time, a little more resolution, a little more sacrifice, and a little more love, than some churches require of their members, but no more than it will be good for us to give.

III. Conclusion:

Remember:

We will grow wonderfully and well because of God's generous and wondrous gifts in our lives and our willingness and ability to be generous givers and to share these God given gifts with others.