3-22-20 Where Your Treasure Is Rev. Amy Haines

1 Tim 6:17-19, Mt 6:19-21 Lent- Walking with Jesus

Online Worship

Two weeks ago, right before shoppers began to panic buy and hoard, Ken went grocery shopping—and came home with a case of paper towels and two cases of toilet paper. When I started laughing, he said he bought it because it was on sale and he had a coupon! We do have five of us in our house. Little did we know how precious those supplies would become in the week that followed.

Have you been one to hoard supplies these past two weeks, or have you bought supplies for other people? Have you grumbled at limits set by stores, or thankful they are trying to make supplies available to all who are in need?

Our world has shifted drastically over the past two weeks. Each day has brought more closures and more sickness. Each day we have settled more into the reality that the worst is yet to come.

And yet, each day I am also hearing and seeing more stories of kindness and generosity.

Friends offering extra toilet paper to one another. Customers in line buying extra baby wipes for the mom trying to potty train and limited to one pack. Extravagant tips given to waiters. Face masks being hand sewn for stressed out healthcare workers and concerned nursing home residents. Businesses donating produce to food pantries.

In times of crisis, our priorities are going to shift. Will we shift our priorities to show our selfishness or our generosity? My hope and prayer is that this crisis will bring out our best, not our worst. Our generous nature, not our greed.

We are called to be generous today because God is generous. Generous with love and forgiveness. Generous with compassion and hope. Generous with comfort and promise.

We are created in the image of our generous God. Therefore, we are created for generosity to be the regular rhythm of our lives.

During this season of the church year called Lent, this congregation has been on a journey I have called “Walking with Jesus.” We have been reflecting on holy habits that strengthen our walk with Jesus when they become part of our daily rhythm. For when we strengthen our walk with Jesus, we then better respond to God in word and action, in living with God and living for God.

Previously in Lent, we have reflected on the holy habits of worship, prayer, the study of scripture and service.

As we continue to navigate a temporary new normal, the holy habits of worship, prayer and scripture ground us to live by faith, not fear. Then, when we live by faith, growing in our walk with Jesus, we live out our faith through service and giving.

The holy habit of giving goes beyond just financial riches. God invites us to give, God encourages us to be generous, not only with our money, but also with our time, our energy, and our attention to others.

God invites us to find a treasure that cannot rust or be lost on the whims of the stock market.

God invites us to find a treasure that is not gone when we are physically absent one from another.

The treasure God invites us to find is God’s own ways, learned as we journey with Jesus.

The treasure God encourages us to embrace is God’s own love and generosity, faith and hope.

As Jesus proclaims, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Today, Jesus invites us to treasure God’s heart and God’s ways of generosity and community instead of the world’s ways of greed and fear.

In the midst of a previous global crisis, Winston Churchill once said,

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

-Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 4: Give p.101

As God is generous, God invites us to practice generous. For when we do so, then we find joy. The joy of God’s ways as our ways; the joy of helping others with nothing expected in return.

Rev. Adam Hamilton, in his book “The Walk,” invites us to grow in the holy habit of giving in three ways.

First, we cultivate a desire for what we already have. We give thanks for what we already possess instead of always wanting more.

This week, when my children mourned that the library was closed, I strongly encouraged them to go through their book cases in order to pass down books that they never read or are now too young for them. Nathan passed two shelves worth of books to Rachel, including his classic Dr. Seuss books. Rachel, in turn, made a pile of books for early readers that are now too simple for her. In the process, both kids gave thanks for what they had, while finding books they have never read. Timothy found a new series to read from Nathan’s rich book collection. My children gave thanks that while the library is closed, they have plenty of books to choose from to read.

Maybe this week you have found a renewed thanks for board games, or books, or even your Bible. Maybe you have connected with friends you often have not had much time to connect with. Maybe this time has allowed you to take a step back, breathe, and say, I don’t need new clothes this month, or a new car when mine is still in perfect condition. As you begin to recognize what you don’t need, give thanks for what you already have.

The second way we cultivate a holy habit of giving is to live purposefully.

What adds meaning to our lives? What gives us a sense of purpose?

For some people right now, this is a hard habit to cultivate when their purpose was in their position and their job is no longer there. Yet purpose-filled living goes beyond our work.

Living purposefully is grounded in following Jesus, and following Jesus’ call to love God and love neighbor. This is done not only at work, but also with strangers. This is giving not only through our resources but also through our time and energy and attention to others.

We can all live purposefully whether we are working or laid off; whether we have riches or struggle to make ends meet; whether we are students or retirees.

One widow in our congregation lives purposefully by sending inspirational texts to others each day. Many of you have lived purposefully this week by calling each other and being attentive to each other’s grief and struggle. A call or text does not cost a dime! Yet those are ways we still are generous with one another, giving of our time and attention.

Victor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist whose family was sent to the concentration camps because they were Jewish. While he was in the camps, he noticed that some of the prisoners woke up each morning with the attitude that they still had something to live for, typically a sense of meaning they found in serving their fellow prisoners.

Frankl began developing a theory that gave rise to an entire new field of psychotherapy called logotherapy. Frankl concluded that human beings who found a sense of meaning in their lives dealt better with their bleak situation. They coped more effectively with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. They were mentally healthier when they believed they were living for some purpose larger than themselves.

-Adam Hamilton, “The Walk” Chapter 4: Give p.97

Frankl found his purpose in the camps through continuing to love his wife, not even knowing whether she was dead or alive. Yet that love gave him a purpose to fight to live another day.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to a purpose-filled living of loving God and loving neighbor. How can you find purpose in caring for others this week? How can you find purpose in encouraging one another this week? How can you find purpose while creating new rhythms of family life or self-care or personal devotion or rest?

The third way we cultivate a holy habit of giving is generosity toward God and others that becomes the shape and treasure of our heart.

Our individual tithes and offerings given to the church are also our expressions of gratitude toward our generous God. Yet together, they allow the church to have a collective impact on others greater than any one of us could do on our own.

In United Methodism, today is UMCOR Sunday. It is a way to fund the structure for the United Methodist Committee on Relief so that 100% of individual offerings in times of natural disaster locally, nationally or globally go toward those in need.

This past week, the location and structure of our church building became a blessing as we became a food distribution site for SCAC. Currently there are three deck boxes in our lobby that on Wednesday nights will be moved to the front porch and filled with non-perishable food. Our front awning was a blessing this past Wednesday in the pouring rain, as it kept food and volunteers dry. The upkeep of our building is funded through your generous giving. The food distributed was purchased through the generosity of many folks in town.

Together, we are in ministry not only in our church building, but now beyond our church.

Friends, the church has left the building! The church is still alive and well through us if we are still loving others in the name of Jesus.

How have you been generous in the past two weeks, with your resources and your time, your energy and your thankfulness? I would love to hear your stories on our Facebook page or through email.

There are many ways we are called today to give of ourselves, caring for one another as a way to share the love of Jesus. Yet the holy habit of giving does not come naturally to our selfish natures. It takes practice to be generous with our time and resources, just like all our holy habits take practice.

As you continue in this season of Lent, consider five ways you can cultivate generosity still this month. Maybe you can give of your resources, time and attention in these ways:

\*financially support your local food pantries

\*connect with five neighbors or church members in the next five days

\*fill one bag from each room in your house with items you can give away to others

\*be generous with “Thank You” to five overworked grocery store workers or mailmen or other essential personnel

\*give 5% more on your tip to restaurant workers

We may be limited now in where we may go, but we are not limited in the many ways we can share God’s generosity, care and love with others.

When we live by the holy habit of generous giving,

we live into what Paul proclaimed to Timothy:

Do good, be rich in good works, be generous, share with others.

For then we store up the treasure of a good foundation for the future,

not a foundation of riches but a foundation of living steeped in giving,

so that we may take hold of the life that really is life.

May this be the life we live now, and into the future, walking with Jesus as we live by God’s ways. May God guide us to make it so. Let us pray.

HYMNS on this day:

#292 “What Wondrous Love is This”

#398 “Jesus Calls Us”