

Get On Board The Generosity Train

The Rev. Dr. Katherine L. Ward

The best gifts to give: To your friend, loyalty; To your enemy, forgiveness; To your boss, service; To a child, a good example; To your parents, gratitude and devotion; To your mate, love and faithfulness; To all men and women, charity.

- Oren Arnold

We have a faithful, compassionate, generous God and, in return, God demands faith, compassion and generosity from us. God's gives us more than we can desire or pray for. A thousand-year-old Jewish Passover song, *Dayenu* (It would have sufficed us!), states this phenomenon better than I can. The lyrics tell the Passover story and asks, "How many levels of favors has the Omnipresent One bestowed upon us?": The song has fifteen verses, stressing the gifts bestowed on the Israelites, five about leaving slavery, five naming the miracles that helped them to survive and five about being with God, all the while emphasizing the fact that even one gift would have been enough . . . but God never gives us simply enough. The God who created the world and us, preserves and blesses us in this life, and most important of all, redeemed us by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory, is generous beyond measure. God sent Jesus that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly. That is

why our lessons today ask us to board the generosity train which will take us to a place where we will be generous to each other, especially to those who are less fortunate than we are, where we will live in a right relationship with God, and live the kind of life which will make us holy temples, acceptable to God.

God's faithfulness is great. There is no shadow of turning with God. God doesn't change and God's compassion never ends. It has been and always will be there. Great is God's faithfulness. If we return that faithfulness and place our hope, faith and trust in God, we can see new mercies every morning. All that we really need, God's hand has provided.

Remembering the gifts of the past and envisioning the hope of a God-directed future helps us to realize how great is God's faithfulness to you and to me. Unfortunately, many of us need to charge the batteries which power our memory and vision. We forget, and fall into a life characterized by constant anxiety. We live out an attitude of scarcity, scrambling for every penny we can get and closing our fists tightly around them. Because we have worked hard for what we have, we feel that we deserve what we have amassed. Our sense of entitlement and our obsession with consumerism has led us to

spiritual bankruptcy. In our efforts to protect what we have, we are fearful of our neighbors. We live behind locked doors and in gated communities. Sharing does not enter many of our heads. We live out the Ruffles commercial wherein craving onlookers are told to get their own bag of chips when we should be living out the Nachos commercial which says crunch all you want. Share. We'll make more. We have forgotten that everything we have belongs to God. Our money, land and/or property are simply gifts from God and we are merely stewards, responsible for them while they are in our possession. Good stewards possess a theology of abundance while poor stewards operate within an attitude of scarcity.

Paul explores the theology of abundance in our epistle. Appealing to the Corinthians, he seeks to motivate them by praising the Macedonians, who, though poor, were cheerful givers who insisted on giving, even beyond their means. He hints that we become rich by becoming poor; we gain power by giving it up; we are liberated by giving up control; That same concept was put forward in the prayer attributed to St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

The theology of abundance helps us to appreciate God’s faithfulness which is present whether it’s summer, winter, springtime or harvest, and while sun, moon and stars are in their courses above. All nature acts as witness to God’s faithfulness, mercy and love. God’s faithfulness gives us spiritual security. God’s mercy grants us pardon for our sins. Jesus’ peace calms us and encourages us to pass it on; and the Holy Spirit cheers and guides us, gives us strength for today and hope for tomorrow. We are wondrously blessed!

We matter to God. There is nothing from which God, through Jesus, cannot deliver us, not even death. The two remarkable acts described in today’s gospel show how Jesus broke with tradition. Touching a corpse was taboo in His society. Yet. He raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. Social and religious etiquette prohibited Jesus from being in the presence of a woman like the one with the issue of blood, but,

rather than scorn or condemn her when she touched the hem of His garment causing his power to flow from Him to her, He recognized her and rewarded her faith to show us the grace of God. That grace has been passed down to us, also. We never need to be fearful or void of hope. We need only to believe, and have faith.

We are called to emulate God's spirit of generosity. Jesus' response to Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood provides an example of how we should respond to our neighbors utilizing all available resources [money, time, devotion, to name a few.] Our response brings the gospel to life. We write our own gospel, a chapter each day by the things that we do and the words that we say. Our lives to the Christian ethic must be true, so, tell me, what is the gospel according to you? What IS the gospel according to you?

I hope that your gospel involves living a life that invites change, embraces generosity, and is dedicated to making this world a better place. If it is, you will hit the mark. Joy will be yours because joy, generosity and fulfillment of purpose travel hand in hand. Living a life prioritized by generosity insures that you give the best gifts: loyalty to your friends, forgiveness to your enemy, service to your boss, a good example to

children, gratitude and devotion to your parents, love and faithfulness to your mates and charity to all people.

God's abundance is all around you. Trust that if you help others to live well, you will live well. Listen to Jesus and make sure that the hungry are fed. Listen to Paul and give according to your means and even beyond your means. Be easy on people. Don't criticize the faults of others or condemn those who are down. Give away your life, and . . . eureka! You will find that giving begets giving with bonus and blessing; for giving, not getting, is the way to becoming holy temples. Truly, generosity begets generosity. It is not enough to pray for the homeless, the hungry, or the sick. You must supply their needs. Here in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, even the poorest of us live in relative abundance and to those to whom much has been given, much is required. You may not be able to raise a child from the dead, multiply loaves of bread or let power flow from your bodies to others, but if you share and are a good steward, you will eventually become a holy temple of God. If you work at getting along with others and with God, one day you may get a glimpse of God.

Armed with faith, hope and love, you are ready now to board the train of generosity. No tickets are required. It's free

and it's powered by love. Tell the people all over the world to join hands and join the Generosity Train. It will be stopping near All Saints soon. Tell all the folks in Oakland, and Hayward, too. Don't you know it's time to get on board and let this train keep on riding, riding on through. Tell all of the brothers and sisters over in Richmond . . . Tell all the folks in Alameda, and El Cerrito, too. Please don't miss this train at the station 'cause if you miss it, I'll feel sorry, sorry for you. So, get on board. Bring all the gifts God has loaned you in this life. You'll need them to spread generosity. The gifts are expendable, the days keep coming whether you welcome them or not and the train keeps rolling. So, stop sitting on your hands. Stop dragging your feet. Instead, join hands and board the Generosity train. Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Get on board and ride until love is no longer in need of love, Ride until racism, hatred, bigotry, ageism, sexism and all the isms that separate us from one another no longer exist. Ride with the people at Mother Emanuel who responded to hate with love and forgiveness and turned the perpetrator's purpose inside out. Ride with the Episcopal Church of the United States who elected my seminary classmate, Katharine Jefferts Schori, as its 26th Presiding Bishop the first woman to hold such a position, and who followed it

up in a landslide vote to elect the first African American, Bishop Michael Curry, to follow her as its 27th. Ride with all the good people from all over the globe, including the actress who portrays Queen Elsa at Disney World, who comforted the three-year-old Aboriginal girl from outside Melbourne when racists told her that Queen Elsa [from *Frozen*] couldn't be black because black was ugly. Ride with the Supreme Court Justices who respected the dignity and worth of same sex couples this week. Ride with the twenty-five year old young lady who has fed over 570,000 homeless people with excess food from corporate events through her own nonprofit service in San Francisco. Ride with the Middle School basketball team in Kenosha, WI who not only walked off the court when people in the stands made fun of cheerleader Desiree Andrews who has Down syndrome, but who has continually followed up to make her feel special. And, ride with all of God's people who stand up for justice, peace, righteousness, and the word of God.

Ride! Ride! Ride!

Amen.

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