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1 Timothy 6:6-19
November 25, 2018

Standing in the Presence of God

“There is a story of a woman who had finished shopping and returned to her car. When she got there she was surprised to find four men inside the car. She dropped her shopping bags, drew a handgun, and screamed, "I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car NOW!" Those men did not wait for a second invitation; they got out and ran like crazy.

The woman, understandably shaken, loaded her shopping bags and then got into the car. But no matter how she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition. Then it dawned on her: her car was parked four or five spaces away!

She loaded her grocery bags into her own car and then drove to the police station to turn herself in. The desk sergeant to whom she told the story nearly fell off his chair laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four men were reporting a carjacking by an old woman with thick glasses and curly white hair, less than five feet tall, and carrying a large handgun. No charges were filed.

You see, she thought it was her car, but it really belonged to someone else. So often we approach life like this. Right? We think our lives are our own, but they really belong to God.”¹

That is the essence behind our scripture text today as Paul encourages Timothy live in a way that acknowledges God’s goodness. In life and in death, we belong to the Lord. And one day we each will stand before the Lord and give an account for how we lived our lives.

Please open up your bibles and read with me from Paul’s Letter to Timothy. This was written at the tail end of Paul’s ministry before his imprisonment and death in Rome. I believe these are some of his last words of legacy that he had hoped to pass on to Timothy, his son in the faith.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

We’ve spent the fall talking about what it means to live generously. We know that giving our money is an important spiritual discipline to develop. But if we truly believe that in life or in death, we belong to the Lord, then living generously entails giving from all that we are and not just what we have in our wallets. Jesus is Lord of all.

So we expanded our scope to include our talents. God has endowed each of us with spiritual gifts, passions, and talents. Things that are unique to us that only

¹ Greg Laurie, "A Time to Worship," Decision (November 2001); submitted by Van Morris posted on Preaching Today Website at <https://www.preachingtoday.com/search/?query=matthew%2025:14-30&type=&start=21>

we can do. Through our Talents Challenge, we've entrusted some of our Benevolence Funds into your care. Our hope is that as good stewards, we will put those talents to work and increase what we've been given or we will use those talents for something that we are passionate about which will further God's kingdom in our midst.

This touches on the next area in which we are called to live generously. Through sharing our ideas and creativity. Some of us may even pool our talents, ideas, and creativity together making an even greater impact than what we could have on our own. Do you know if you yoke two work horses together they don't just pull double the weight they could individually, but exponentially more? That's called synergy.

Creativity begets creativity. Idea sharing creates more ideas. Which encourages others to share ideas which unleashes more creativity. See how that works?

As Christians we should be some of the most creative and encouraging people out there. Our God is a creative and encouraging God. And that image is imprinted upon each of us.

Paul tells the Hebrews, "Let us consider how we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the day approaching."²

Living generously also calls us to practice hospitality. Again Paul encourages the Hebrews, "Keep loving each other as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels without knowing it."³

But before we can practice hospitality, we need to make space in our lives for other people. One of the problems with many of us Christians today is that our lives are just too full. We don't have room for others outside our immediate social circles and so we miss out on the opportunity to welcome the stranger into our homes.

The greatest missional calling in the church today is not how can we create more programs to attract people to our church but how can we be good neighbors and invite people into our lives. As we do that, we share our faith and our church community with them.

As we step into Advent, how might the Spirit of the Lord be inviting us to prepare space for Jesus through the stranger? Do we have room at our inn?

² Hebrews 10:23-25

³ Hebrews 13:1-2

Another way that we have been challenged to live more generously is through our service. Whether it is here at church, through our schools, or in our community, we each are called to offer ourselves in service to others. The more we serve, the more we realize just how much we have to give.

The Apostle Paul encouraged the Church in Philippi to think beyond themselves. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Looking not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” And we do that by following Jesus’ example and taking on the nature of a servant.

Humbly and sacrificially giving ourselves way.

Mother Teresa who was the ultimate example of one who did just that among the poorest of the poor on the streets of Calcutta India, said “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

What small thing is God calling us to do today with great love?

Service spills over into pursuing social justice. In other words, we do what is right because it is the right thing to do. The Prophet Micah challenges us that more than our monetary offering what God desires of us is “to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.”⁴ James says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”⁵

And finally last week, we heard from Rob Hagan from the Presbyterian Foundation that living generously also entails giving generously. Jesus told the story about the poor widow who gave two small copper coins from her poverty and all she had to live off of in comparison to those for whom their gifts cost them very little. God doesn’t care about the size of our gifts, he cares about our hearts as we give.

Can we dance down the aisle with our gifts?

So we can see that living generously is indeed multifaceted.

What we put in the offering place is merely representative of every aspect of our lives. If we live with the idea that God has greatly blessed us with abundance, then we will give abundantly. If we live with the idea that God has scarcely given to us, then we will give scarcely. It just depends on the perspective of the God that we have.

Paul’s words to Timothy are aimed to expand our view of God the Father and to be content with what we have been given.

Have we brought anything into the world with us? No!

Will we take anything out of it? No!

⁴ Micah 6:8

⁵ James 1:27

Then why not give ourselves away now while we are living and so be part of God's joy as we further his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?

Let us not put our hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put our hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. That's right. Everything for our enjoyment! God is that good to us!

But let us be rich in love and good deeds, being generous and willing to share. If we do these things we will store up for ourselves treasures in heaven and live life to the fullest now while we have the chance.

As I close this series on living generously, I want to share a poem from C.T. Studd who was a missionary to China in the 1880's. As a young man, Studd met Christ leaving behind a life in which he tasted every worldly pleasure. After his conversion, he decided to join Hudson Taylor on the mission field in China. It was then that Studd learned that he was to inherit a large amount of money from his father's estate upon his twenty fifth birthday. 25!

Reading the Bible and praying, he felt convinced he should give his fortune away to show the world that he relied not on money but on a living Lord. The Lord, he was sure, would bless him a hundred-fold in non-monetary ways and provide him sufficient resources to live on. "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me," he argued, "then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

His poem is titled "Only One Life."

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,
And stand before His Judgement seat;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,

Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill,
living for self or in His will;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

One day our lives are going to pass and we will stand in the presence of God.
May we have the same confidence as C.T. Studd who relied not on money but
on the living Lord. May we see that our God is a good Father who has graciously
entrusted all things into our care. And may we give all things back to God in
returns as a way of our living generously while we have time.

We have only one life my friends, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
Amen!