

## *Shiloh United Methodist Church*

1 Timothy 6:17-19

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### ***Extravagant Generosity: Ministry Flows From the Heart***

Series Video:

<https://www.facebook.com/shilohbillings.church/videos/1771670642855073/>

One of my favorite poets refers to the readouts we see on an EKG machine as the skyline of the heart. These machines measure the rhythm of electrical signals, the ups and downs of the muscle in our chests that we associate with our life force and passion. With each passing up and down our hearts pump red oceans through our veins each day. In a tireless rhythm, a healthy heart reveals the regular pace of life and the way we are called to love by Jesus.

An unhealthy heart, fluctuates on that rhythm, not always keeping beat. It misses a beat or two, or loses the steady rhythm. However, even an unhealthy heart works to remain faithful to the task of driving the very life force that keeps us alive. The liquid that nourishes our wholeness through a twisting and complex highway of veins and vessels.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, we begin our sermon series on generosity, and also, we give our appropriate Methodist nod to the celebration of the reformation and recognize its overwhelming influence on how we follow the ways of Christ.

All Saints Day marks the day each year when we as Christians honor the saints. For United Methodists saints are not just those who have been officially recognized by the church, and our saints may not have been recognized by many people in their lives. For us as followers of Jesus, Saints are the people who have influenced our faith and have helped us to reset the rhythm of our hearts on this up and down journey of life.

One January day, I got a call from a daughter who was concerned about her father. She was wondering if a pastor from the church I was serving would meet with him every once in a while. I knew the daughter and her father just a little bit. They would come every Sunday and sit in the same place, they were always gracious when leaving worship and appreciative of the sermon.

I set up a time to go meet with the woman's father, and I arrived at his simple and beautiful home. We went inside and he offered me a seat in a nice rocking armchair, identical to his, in front of his living room picture window. I remember the day well; the sun was shining in on both of us. Richard began to share with me, with tears in the corner of his eyes the prognosis he had received from his doctor. Richard had been struggling with some heart conditions for a while, and after his most recent appointment he learned they could do no more surgery. The doctor instead informed Richard that he would die from congestive heart failure and to expect no more than 6 months. Richard and I prayed, and I listened to him tell about his life, his children, and his joys in living.

After that first meeting, we decided I would come about once a month to sit with one another, and I let Richard know I would love to hear about his vast knowledge of Civil War and Montana history.

We made a meeting happen each month, each time Richard would invite me inside and offer me a seat in that rocking arm chair. He would share with me stories of family, we would even talk a little politics, and then I would listen to some tid-bits of history from Richard. Every time we would sit in front of that picture window in his living room, and most days the sun was shining in on us.

One day I sat down in that nice rocking arm chair, in that sun coming through the picture window, and for the life of me I could barely stay awake as Richard and I talked. Now, I need to confess something, Richard's voice did not have much inflection, and while the history was

fascinating I felt somedays like I was watching a documentary on TV with a narrator in the background. At one point I am sure I slipped into sleep for a matter of seconds, and then woke up a lot embarrassed to do that to someone I knew only from these monthly visits. I apologized profusely, and Richard graciously let me know that he did not mind. The company meant a lot to him in these times. We prayed that day together for strength for him and rest for me.

I would keep coming back to Richard's home and I have to admit I fell asleep one or two other times too. These visits went far beyond the 6 months we originally had thought, they lasted for nearly 14 months. Richard far outlived the doctor's expectation for his heart. I dare say it was his steady nature that kept that heart beating beyond its expiration date. When I would see Richard in church he would say, "Well....I am still here." Then one day he passed away, quietly surrounded by his family.

As I worked with his children to prepare Richard's memorial service I found myself wanting to let them know how important the meetings with their father had been for me. They shared with me that it had meant a lot to their father too. Then I found myself being honest with his children about the falling asleep part, and they all laughed. They said, we had the same thing happen to us often too. Dad, loved to provide a space for us to listen to him share stories, and he didn't really worry if we were awake or not.

I will always remember Richard for providing a space for me to sit in that rocking arm chair, in front of that picture window with the sun streaming in. For his steady way of sharing stories and for the time we spent together in the company of one another. Richard for me is a saint, a saint for being gracious with his safe rocking arm chair, for sharing with me his stories, and for always being a gracious person to so many people. Richard isn't a saint for saving the world, or doing the best things. Richard is a saint because he made space for others to grow and be.

Our scripture today comes from 1 Timothy, in the passage Paul is exhorting the Jesus followers under his care to not become too attached to their physical belongings. For Paul, it is a reminder to them that physical objects will not bring people into a closer connection with God. And in this time, it is also tied to that fact that material wealth often means colluding with the violent Roman Empire all around them. In this passage, he invites the people to consider the fact that if they let go of their attachments to wealth, they might in fact take hold of the life Christ spoke of.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (CEB)

<sup>17</sup> Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. <sup>19</sup> When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.

Earlier in this text Paul warns against the popular wisdom on money of his day. I am sure it was people saying things in his day like, “I have earned what I have, so let me spend it how I please.” People say this today. They are right, but Paul is inviting something different. He is saying there is nothing wrong with earning things, but do not hold onto just those things for eventually they will fail you. Full life comes from a generous heart born of the celebration that God loves each of us, and calls us to share this love with our neighbors through all our means.

I have some questions for us all today:

Have you eaten today? Something like 20,864<sup>1</sup> will die from hunger today.

Do you have a car? About 7 billion people don't have cars.<sup>2</sup>

Do you have a college degree? Only about 7% of the world does, 93% think you have it pretty well off

Finally do you have a computer? About 22% of the world owns or shares a computer, this means 78% think you have it pretty good.<sup>3</sup> And if you are like me you have more than one.

Most of us have it pretty good. To most of the world we are the "rich" Paul is talking about.

The question Paul is posing to us is, "Is your hope tied to your financial well-being, or do you trust in God's love?"

This year we are celebrating the reformation, a time in the year 1517 which Martin Luther took 95 Theses and nailed them to the door of a church in Germany. A time that shifted the Christian church in the west to focus again on the grace and love of God, more than the doctrines of control and worldly ways.

The same Martin Luther authored a reflection on the book of Romans that inspired a young preacher in England, named John Wesley to start a movement called Methodism. In which he encouraged each person to give a tithe of their wealth, that was recorded in a public journal that was

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.theworldcounts.com/counters/global\\_hunger\\_statistics/how\\_many\\_people\\_die\\_from\\_hunger\\_each\\_year](http://www.theworldcounts.com/counters/global_hunger_statistics/how_many_people_die_from_hunger_each_year)

<sup>2</sup> [http://wardsauto.com/ar/world\\_vehicle\\_population\\_110815](http://wardsauto.com/ar/world_vehicle_population_110815)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.100people.org/statistics\\_100stats.php?section=statistics](http://www.100people.org/statistics_100stats.php?section=statistics)

kept by each group. The money was then given in benevolent and creative ways to lift up the common people of England.

There is a Latin phrase that emerges from the Reformation and follows the saints of John Wesley and Martin Luther, “Semper Reformanda.” Roughly translated it means, “always reforming.” Martin Luther, John Wesley and Paul all loved their traditions they came from, but each one was called to help the spirit of God reach another group of people with God’s message of grace and love. Each of them ended up being a part of a movement of God’s spirit that they never expected.

Each of these saints of our traditions has worked hard to follow their call to God in their lives. In turn they have reformed the church to what it is today. When I look at their histories and their teachings it seems they are always making room for the new leaders to emerge, carving out space with their thoughts and ideas. Then in the next breath they are cheering their people along with encouragement for how to live.

Paul in our text today is reminding us that wealth, material wealth, can drag us away from God, because it stops our hearts from focusing on what really matters. He is cheering along the people he is supporting in the faith, and somehow his message still rings true to us today.

Last month on the today show there was a special on the happiest cities in America, and also outlining the happiest people. One of the stories read, “Residents of these cities say they feel safe, enjoy being active and productive, manage their money well, make time for vacations, eat well and learn something new or interesting every day.”<sup>4</sup> These happy people are doing the things Paul called the early Christians to, and the same thing Wesley and Luther called us to. Manage the resources given us by God in a way that aligns to God’s grace.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.today.com/health/happiest-cities-us-national-geographic-index-t117616>

The Christians described in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy are being asked to share their wealth to make a Christian community. In hopes that their efforts will bring the shining kingdom of God now as it is in heaven. A city of justice and love to invite people into, and where all will be welcomed, cared for and loved. This is a vision laid out in Isaiah to the people of God, because they are longing for a reign of peace and justice. They are hoping to look upon the skyline of a place where they can live their lives fully realized and seek to feel God's love all around them.

What would it be like if we as Methodists became so radically generous that we were known for having hearts of extravagant generosity? What if we were known to have hearts like the saints that were always reforming, and always creating space to cheer others along?

Watch:

<https://chuckknowschurch.com/archive/everyday-gifts-short-1>

On page 22 of our study for this series there is story about Sarah. Sarah grew up in a family that practiced giving a tithe. She remembers receiving her first paycheck for \$560 as a teen and placing the \$5.60 in the church offering plate. She describes the experience with delight, like something natural, something that her heart called her to.

Now Sarah is a high paid executive at a top company, and she still loves to give, and finds it easy. Now for some giving at the 10 percent mark is hard, we are going to be talking over the next few weeks about that initial challenge. The thing to remember for Sarah is she started her "muscle memory" of giving small at first. She compares it to her ability to serve in tennis, it was just something she learned early, and in small steps. It is the same thing Buddy and Judy describe in our Generosity corner in our bulletin today.

Giving should come easy if we do it right, it comes from the full life Paul talks about. It comes from the steady heart beating, the muscle memory of God's grace drawing the skyline of our lives. Today on this

all saints day, let us remember the saints like Saint Richard, Saint Marcy, Saint John Wesley, or Saint Paul. People who let us know that God's grace is available to us all, to call us to this full life of generosity.

This next week as a new step of generosity I invite you to find one way to give one thing away, that you hold dear. Something that seems to be holding you back from truly experiencing God's love. Maybe it is the \$20 bill in your pocket, a box of belongings you thought you needed, or perhaps something you prize that you know someone else needs. Whatever your call is to share, follow it this week.

My hope is this season, that we all become such generous people that they may know each of us as cheerleaders, space creators, reformers, and Saints. Remember even for the saints it started with small and unsure steps.

As we enter our time of communion I am going to invite us to listen as I lift up the saints of Shiloh. These are people who have gone before us, people of Shiloh and of our lives. Would you join me in a moment of silent prayer as these names are read aloud.

(Saints names were read during service, please listen to our podcast at [ShilohBillings.Church](http://ShilohBillings.Church) to hear the names read.)