

Shiloh United Methodist Church

The Generous Church: Tethered to God

Matthew 6:21

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Around the turn of the 20th century manned flight was like the .com boom of the time. Everyone was trying to do it. One man, Samuel Pierpont Langley was the superstar of this work. He received government funding, he had unlimited resources, and the New York Times followed him around every day.

Why then have we rarely, if ever, heard of Samuel Pierpont Langley? He wasn't successful, because even though he had every resource available to him, he sought fame, not achievement.

When we imagine the founders of flight there is a name that brings a sense of pride about who accomplished the first person being in flight. The Wright brothers' name is a name that carries a sense of awe. Orville and Wilbur Wright's successful flight is an image that most of us can recall seeing in the old black and white footage.

Orville and Wilbur worked hard to achieve that accomplishment, they made and sold bicycles and did their flight experiments in their free time. They did not have all the money in the world, but they had a deep ambition to achieve their goals.

Samuel Pierpont Langley should be an American household name too, by all means of resources. Except the Wright brothers beat him to it, and instead of taking the Wright brothers success and inviting them to work with him. Samuel Pierpont Langley quit.

Right now we are in the midst of studying generosity, which is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Generosity is a practice that Jesus called his disciples to practice over and over. The first week we heard of a young man who came to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus response, “Give away all you have to those in need, and you will have a full life.” Last week, we heard Jesus tell a parable about one son who squandered the resources of his inheritance, and one who was responsible. Jesus reminds us that generosity is about welcoming everyone back to God, no matter how far they have to travel or the obstacles they have to overcome, in fact that we celebrate the ones who have to travel the farthest.

Today and next week I am going to have us turn to the Gospel of John. If you are looking this up in your own Bible, turn to John chapter 6.

John 6:1-14 New International Version (NIV)

6 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹²When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Jesus in this story points to the need for us to follow 3 simple practices to help us live generously.

#1 make a budget.

The budget in our story may not be clear, but let’s remember for a moment the little boy. He knew he could share the loaves and fish, and he did not turn the disciples away. Budget are plans about sharing what we have. Throughout the scripture God asks us to plan how to provide for those in our family, or friends, and also set aside the first fruits of our labor to give away to the community.

(Video – Ropes Course)

Each of the rules God shares in scripture and especially through these stories of Jesus calls us to a generosity that God believes can transform our lives and the world. Let’s listen for a minute to this gentleman who is sharing the rules for staying safe.

Budgets, implemented with God’s rules can help us to stay tethered to God. They help us not get distracted by all the things we think we are supposed to spend our resources on, and instead using our resources to help transform the world into the Kingdom Jesus inspires us to imagine. A kingdom where people can eat and gather together.

#2 practice, live simply.

Matthew 6:21 Common English Bible (CEB)

²¹ Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This is a challenge in our world of things, if you have resources you are told to “buy more.” If you don't have resources, you are told, “You will be more when you have more.” I think it is important to pay attention to the Wright Brothers and Samuel Pierpont Langley. Langley had every resource he could possibly need, and yet he could not break free into flight.

The Wright Brothers with the simple hard work, a good life, and a dream accomplished great things. Langley wanted to win, and if we learn anything from Christ it is that a full life does not come from winning, but from trusting God, being generous and loving our neighbor.

The Wright Brothers inspired us to take flight, and they did so tethered to their dream and not to having it all. Imagine what we can do when we are tethered to God, and don't try to have it all.

Having the house you can clean easily, the car that does what you need, and even the life that is easier on your soul is what living simply means. The people that day gathered around Jesus were inspired by a young boy, and shared from what they had. The boy did not have a lot, but in the simplicity of his gift many ate and heard a word of love from Jesus.

#3 rule, set goals for your generosity.

Jesus dreamed big in our gospel story today. There were 5000 people there, and in some estimates that was just the count of the males present, so there may have been 2 to 3 times that number. His disciples haven't budgeted for this possibility and they haven't dreamed big enough about they can achieve God's level of generosity.

Setting Jesus size goals for generosity means believing we will be able to give enough to accomplish God's goals, that we are enough in what we give. This means financially what if we set

out to say, I will always aim to give 10% of my income. For my family and I, that was as we began 10% of our net income after taxes, and we imagine a day where it can be more like 10% of our gross income. When we set those goals we do it to imagine a way where we can participate more in Jesus' vision of giving. In those decisions too, we state that the goal we set in prayer is enough for now, and we trust God can use our prayerful enough with a dream to grow to begin the work of God on earth.

I know that is enough because of stories like this:

Last winter the Blackfeet Reservation in Northern Montana was inundated with snow, that drifted until it covered the tops of houses. People were trapped in their homes sometimes for days at a time. Part of my giving each year supports our church and about 13% of that goes to the larger United Methodist Church.

That 13% is designed to support our other churches and help create a network of Methodists who care for God's creation and dream together with God. My friend and colleague Rev. Dawn Skerritt, led the effort to help the Blackfeet Reservation along with my colleague Pastor Calvin Hill in Browning. Dawn even said that one day the editor of the newspaper in the area strolled in to her church in Columbia Falls, not believing it was a command post for the relief effort, only to find 13 people on personal cell phones moving relief efforts supplies into place.

Part of my budgeting as a Pastor is time to support other United Methodist Churches, so I took time to produce a video that we could show our churches. A video that a local news station donated footage we could use on. That video inspired a church in Colorado to send a semi-truck of potatoes from Colorado to help feed people trapped in their homes.

Dawn and Calvin did all the heavy work, but my own budgeting of time and resources to our local church made it possible for God's dream of people surviving came true.

Calvin let me know they are going to need more help this coming year, and I am prayerfully seeking ways to increase my giving to their cause.

Today we have covered these things towards being more generous and tethering ourselves to God.

#1 – Set a Budget

#2 – Live simply

#3 – Set goals for generosity

This week I invite you to practice these things a couple different ways:

Giving Challenge

Recently you received an Estimate of Giving card in the mail. If you didn't get one, you'll find some in the pews today. This week, fill out the Estimate of Giving card. Set a goal for your generosity and be a part of the launch pad that is our church. We'll be talking more about it next week, and we'll collect the cards.

Messy Church Challenge

We are beginning a ministry to support our community through Messy worship. This means interactive worship for all ages, where we can encounter God, enjoy each other's company over a meal and celebrate time together. We would like you to join us. If you can come this week on Tuesday at 5:30pm it would be a great support, come be with us. If you can't make it this week, come sometime this fall. We are meeting

each Tuesday at 5:30pm and it goes to 6:30pm, we will not meet October 30. We need your presence and prayer to start connecting new families to Shiloh.

We are called to live generous lives as a spiritual practice, God calls us to generously share love and to support one another. I pray that you find time this week to practice it. Friends, if we can practice these skills, we will find in life an openness to let go and let God guide us to something that only God has yet dreamed of.

Shalom and Amen