

Shiloh United Methodist Church
Refreshingly Generous

Matthew 10:42

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Proverbs 11:24-25

Matthew 10:42 Common English Bible (CEB)

⁴² I assure you that everybody who gives even a cup of cold water to these little ones because they are my disciples will certainly be rewarded.”

Proverbs 11:24-25 Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁴ Those who give generously receive more,
but those who are stingy with what is appropriate will grow needy.

²⁵ Generous persons will prosper;
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

The traveler and a stone

A good and wise woman once lived in the mountains. She knew how to read the winds and the clouds, knew how the weather would be, and conversed with the birds and the animals.

One day as she was walking along the mountain trail her gaze was caught by a large round stone. She picked it up and rubbed it in her hands, noticing its amazing beauty, and instinctively knew that it must be a precious stone.

The next day she met a young traveler who seemed a little lost along the path. He stopped to ask her for a drink of water and they fell into conversation. He couldn't help noticing that she had a large round stone in her basket, and he admired it.

“Please have it if it pleases you so much,” she offered.

And so the traveler took the stone, thanking her, and went on his way. Delighted with his acquisition, he asked a jeweler to look at it, and was told that it was in fact a valuable amethyst. At first he was overjoyed at his luck in being given this stone. But the more he thought about it, the less comfortable he felt. Eventually he made his way back to the mountain and found the woman’s humble lodge.

*“I have brought back the stone you gave me,” he said.
“Perhaps you didn’t know that it was valuable. I really can’t keep it, knowing this. It wouldn’t be right.”*

“Come in, young friend,” she said, “and let me make you a cup of mountain tea.” Then, as they sat together with their tea, she continued, “My friend, I knew the stone was valuable. But you loved it so much I was happy for you to have it.”

Amazed at her generosity, and sensing that she was a woman of extraordinary wisdom, he was speechless. The woman broke the silence. “But, if you really don’t want to keep the stone,” she said, “is there perhaps something else I might give you instead, as a mark of our friendship?”

Her guest thought for a while before replying. “Well, yes,” he said quietly. “Would you perhaps give me a fragment of the precious gift that is in your heart that makes you so wise and so generous? For that would be of far greater value than any stone.”¹

¹ Silf, Margaret. One Hundred More Wisdom Stories (pp. 112-113). Lion Hudson. Kindle Edition.

Source unknown

This month we are studying Grateful, Thankful, Blessed being rooted in generosity. When we talk generosity and Jesus we need to understand that generous was the way Jesus lived, and that we are taking a big risk by even studying how he lived. The people who study and begin to practice the ways of Jesus' risk living differently, they risk being transformed. By just listening to the scripture, and gathering here in worship you are taking the risk that you might leave here and live differently than you did before. If we aren't careful, pretty soon they will require churches to list side-effects in a warning label on our front door.

Video shown -

The scripture we are focused in on for this entire series is one found in the gospel of Luke. A gospel I invited our congregation to read from beginning to end earlier this year. If you haven't got a chance to read it yet, I hope this story inspires you to take some time with it before Christmas.

The scripture we are focused on is:

Luke 8:1-3 The Message (MSG)

8 ¹⁻³ He continued according to plan, traveled to town after town, village after village, preaching God's kingdom, spreading the Message. The Twelve were with him. There were also some women in their company who had been healed of various evil afflictions and illnesses: Mary, the one called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's manager; and Susanna—along with many others who used their considerable means to provide for the company.

In this short “and then,” interlude of the gospel the writer mentions 3 characters that exemplify generosity in a way that dares us to be transformed by generosity. These 3 women funded Jesus’ ministry, when the group ate out at a restaurant they dove for the check, they paid for the places to stay, and bought shoes for the crew when theirs were wearing out.

Last week on All Saint Sunday, we focused on the character of Susanna, only mentioned in this one passage of Luke 8, and yet this footnote saint is key to the ministry of Jesus’ being shared and retold to inspire us to follow God today.

The character from Jesus’ ministry we focus on today is Joanna.

Who is this Joanna? She is the wife of Chuza. You all are probably thinking I should know Chuza, no you won’t cause this is his one place to be named to. No worries though, because Luke the gospel writer clears it up. Chuza is the manager of Herod’s Household.

This should stop us in our tracks, this little interlude passage should make us step back and say, “WHAAAAATTTT?!?!?!?”

Why should this stop us and raise questions? Let’s remember who Herod is. Herod the Great was the puppet King of Israel, puppet of the Romans who died around the year 4. He was a figure who dominated the sociopolitical landscape of Jesus time, he built massive palaces, fortresses and theatres. He killed a lot of people including a wife and some sons. In the gospels he ordered the execution of children when Jesus’ was a baby, making Jesus and his parents refugees.

After his death the his kingdom was split by Rome between 3 sons: Phillip got the east, Herod Antipas got Galilee, and Archelaus got Judea(the Jerusalem area). Archelaus made a mess of his area and was replaced by Pontius Pilate the Roman governor we know. Phillip

disappeared and Herod Antipas was given Galilee, where Jesus' ministry occurred.

Herod Anitpas was a very rich man with lots of land, riches and wealth. And who managed the wealth? Chuza the husband of Joanna.

Chuza was responsible for this massive wealth, which would have meant he was wealthy in turn. He shares this wealth with his wife, who travels with an itinerant rabbi, paying the bills for the group.

Joanna would have been the elite. Her husband is the chief of staff of Herod. That means she could be at lavish banquets, with singers and dancers. Staying in nice homes scattered throughout the kingdom and having access to the best clothes, inventions, etc.

She is just not interested in it. As preacher Rob Bell puts it, she is instead sharing a Motel 6 in Cana with Mary who used to have seven Demons. She is sitting around the dinner table with small-town fisherman who are probably in their late teens and early twenties.²

Joanna is meeting lepers, and hearing sermons to thousands of people by a man many of us know as Jesus.

One last thing we want to know here from scripture a verse from Luke 13:31. ³¹ *At that time, some Pharisees approached Jesus and said, "Go! Get away from here, because Herod wants to kill you."*

This should be no surprise, Jesus is going around talking about a new kingdom. A kingdom of God in which the twelve guide the people to remember that God has blessed everyone with an opportunity to be transformed and live the new kingdom. Herod wants to maintain the old kingdom, it is the source of his wealth and power. He want to stamp Jesus ministry out.

² This section of exegesis is based heavily on Rob Bell's *What is the Bible?* Harper One 2017.

FYI Jesus does not hedge his bets in response to Herod. What does Jesus call Herod? Just a little background in the culture of the day if you want to honor someone you call them a lion. If you want to call them a dodgy and skiddish human you call them a fox.

Jesus says in Luke 13:32, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Look, I’m throwing out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work.’”

In other words, Jesus is saying I am talking about real transformation and I will continue to do it. He is saying this kingdom is not of the Herodians or the Romans, it is of God. It is like today saying this world is not controlled by Republicans or Democrats, America or China, it is a world rooted deeply in our God who invites to be transformed by love, not war or violence or money.

This is the thing about Joanna too then, she uses money intended to preserve the violent kingdom and power of the Herodians and Rome and instead uses it to fund the ministry of God’s son, the rebel rabbi of Galilee.

We still get to join Joanna in this work. The work didn’t end with a gruesome and violent death on a cross. The work didn’t end with Jesus going into heaven. The work is ongoing still.

Our world today is still based deeply on the finances that ruled Jesus’ day. Money that funds violence to keep people in control, money that invites healers who know not what they do, and money that we get told we need to spend just to have the next best thing. What if like Joanna we funded the things that turn that world on end? That say, love and justice will rule the day, and not war and hate. A statement from Joanna that maybe we don’t need the precious stone instead we need the life transforming advice of one who part of God’s kingdom already.

As a pastor, I began my role in spiritual leadership anxious to talk about money. Anxious because the primary model we see in our culture around Christianity and money is televangelist preachers on TV stealing money from the poor and hurting and buying private jets.

However, what if Jesus' message through Joanna, Susanna, and Mary is that everyday people can be a part of a rebellion of love by falling in love with two things that tend to sound anything but rebellious.

Budgets and Offering Plates

Budgets and Offering Plates don't sound rebellious, but they are.

Budgets –

Let's talk about budgets. I know people avoid them in their lives and marriages, and all around. I know this because finances is still one of the thing that breaks up most healthy marriages, and is a source of major challenge in the lives of individuals. Let me tell you what I have learned.

First, I like you have certain things I like a certain way. I like to have newer technology, so I can design the next best thing. I am a star trek fan, so I don't mind a car with more technology because it feels like a space ship. I like to have a house that looks good, lights, heat, and do fun things with my family. Some of these things are fine, some of them could be taken to excess and people always want me to buy more. I also have to pay my bills, and sometimes adulting is hard and there are way too many financial things to figure out like retirement, insurance, and more.

How can grappling through this be a spiritual practice?

When you take time to sit down with what you are earning, and intentionally set aside a certain amount to give to church, charity and

gifts to others, there is a certain freedom that enters your heart. My wife Crystal and I have taken time to do this annually, and when we forget it raises both our anxiety. When we do it, we feel ready to give and to take adventures, and to trust that God will help us provide for more than just our family from the abundance of gifts God shares with us.

When you do your budgeting always, always take a section of your first fruits before you budget for yourself and give a certain percentage away. This spiritual practice will make your budgeting even more grounded in the loving rebellion of Jesus.

Offering Plates –

Alright, this is why I started asking us to applaud the offering. The offering plate, if you do your spiritual work should be a fun thing to see each week.

Here is the story I remember every time I see an offering plate.

One night I was in a bar...with a bunch of old pastors. Not young ones, old ones. One of the old white bearded pastors, while we were buying drinks, said, "We need to be taking an offering." He took off his hat and we passed it around and all through in some money for a mission in Africa. The next day we told our bishop that story, and she was blown away at how much we raised in a baseball cap at a bar to share God's love half a world away.

The offering plate is an act of loving rebellion against the powers of this world. And as long as I am a pastor I will always love knowing that when I ask for applause at offering it is because your money supports widows who come in off the street who have lost their husbands, the spiritual life of mittens being handed to homeless, household goods being given to those who need them, meals to people who least expect them, a spiritual home for people from all walks of life trying to work through our differences to share God's message of love.

As a pastor I love the idea that the money we offer to our church is made a sign of love and grace in this world. That there is faithful leaders working to see that the money you offer, the hours you volunteer with us, and the work we do together is an act of saying, “God’s kingdom is here, and we are attempting to know and share the God of compassion with others.”

Offering plates and budgets built on generous giving are acts of rebellion.

Offering plates and budgets make us refreshingly generous because like our scripture for today reminds us, Jesus asks us to give refreshing water to people to take part in his actions to love the world.

People of Shiloh...People of God’s peace and love...this is our call.

To love others, to love God...by all the means we can, in any way we can, whenever we can.

Amen