SACRED GENEROSITY: GIVING AS WORSHIP

By Nancy S. Cushman

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

November 19, 2017 North Scottsdale UMC

# SETTING THE CONTEXT

The setting of the Book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell address to the Hebrew people who, after 40 years in the desert, are about to enter the Promised Land. It’s like his guidebook of instructions from God for when they set up their communities in the Promised Land. Our reading today follows some instruction on the tithe, that is setting apart 1/10 of your yield for the Lord. Our passage today focuses on generosity and love of neighbor. It talks about the sabbatical year. Like the sabbath day provides a weekly day of rest and release, the sabbatical year was meant to provide rest and release from large burdens and debts that would otherwise oppress and enslave those who were weighed down by them. It applied the idea of sabbath to the economic sphere. It also speaks to us about generosity and the poor.

Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11

# THE SERMON

Do we end our week with worship or begin our week with worship? It’s kind of both, isn’t it? We come to worship and bring before God what we have experienced during the previous week, but we also turn to God in worship for being recharged, reinvigorated and inspired for the week that is coming. We come to remember or be reminded that we are indeed blessed, that we are not alone- we have God and each other, that we are called to not only believe in Jesus, but to be like him and we reflect on and practice what that looks like in the twenty-first century. Worship reorients us, it reorders our values and priorities by focusing us on God and God’s way. It draws our attention to the eternal and to the character of God. It reminds us to be thankful for all that God has given us. **In one sense worship ends at the end of the hour, but in another, depending upon our choices, it can extend on through the rest of the week. We are sent out to live the life and values that we’ve just reflected upon.**

Generosity is one of those characteristics of God that we consider and practice in worship. ***Lauren Wright says, “Giving in all its forms, both financial and otherwise, can be an act of worship by virtue of its unique power to remind us that life itself, with all its ups and downs, all its struggles and heartaches and victories, is fundamentally a gift from God.”***[[1]](#endnote-1) It is a means of making our gratitude tangible and of passing the blessing on to others. Today’s passage makes it sound so straight-forward, if someone asks you give. I struggled with it though because it’s not always easy to tell the most loving action; what about dependency and exploitation? It’s not always clear, at least to me, what is the most loving thing to do. So, I admit to you up front that I wrestle with how to live out this passage. **The Scripture is clear though that just ignoring the poor is not biblical.** Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 15:11 “There will never cease to be some in need on the earth” (Matthew 26:11 and Mark 14:7) and I have heard some people use that as a justification to do nothing, that is however incorrect because Jesus and all the people he was speaking to knew the rest of the sentence, “***I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.***” (Deuteronomy 15:11) Ignoring the poor and needy is not an option for a disciple of Jesus. Part of our calling is to practice the open-hearted, open-handed compassion of God.

As a church, we take God’s call to care for the needy seriously. We extend our worship into the community through our ministries to the poor, needy, and vulnerable. Last week, I shared with you some of our work as a church with children and young adults. Today I’d like to share with you some of the ways our Mission team gives to those in need**. They are entrusted with part of the weekly offering and this is how they managed it for God in your name. This year together we have or will by the end of the year:**

1. **provided two meals a month for the women living at the Halle Women’s Shelter;**
2. **supported the work of the Veteran's Court providing bus passes and food and hygiene supplies to veterans who are turning their lives around;**
3. **partnered with the United Methodist Women to support the Stand Down which provides services and aid to impoverished and homeless veterans,**
4. **supported Trinity Opportunity Alliance which works to move young adults in the foster care system into the workforce,**
5. **gave birthday and Christmas gifts to an Open Table family;**
6. **partnered with Red Mountain UMC to support the women at Perryville Prison with scholarships to cover GED and other educational expenses and provide supportive help upon release and reentry into society;**
7. **supported Rainbow Acres Ranch for developmentally disabled adults and the delightful members of the choir who sang to us last week;**
8. **partner with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to expand their education program.**
9. **support the Wesley/Golden Gate literacy program.**
10. **provide core support for Justa Center: A United Methodist ministry for homeless senior citizens.**

Next year, they plan to provide scholarship support for people doing disaster response on Early Response Teams and to begin a ministry to address the many issues related to sex trafficking. **All this has been done through your weekly offering!** Your open-handed generosity has reached out to so many different vulnerable people.

In September, a group of us were part of an Early Response team that went to Victoria, Texas to help people affected by Hurricane Harvey. It was hands-on work that connected us to people in need and gave us the opportunity to practice the compassion of Christ. I have asked some of the team members to share from their experiences.[[2]](#endnote-2)

These questions were asked of the team members: (you will need to listen to the audio version of this sermon to hear their responses.)

Will you tell us about the people you helped while in Victoria?

What kinds of work did you do?

Why did you volunteer in this way?

Did you experience anything that touched you deeply?

How did this experience impact you spiritually?

Would you volunteer to do something like this again?

Is there anything you’d like to tell the congregation about giving in this way?

**The generous giving of our time, talents and treasure can extend our worship to the poor and vulnerable.** It can put a tangible face on the extravagant love of Christ as we allow him to use our hands and hearts for his work**. It’s not always easy to know the best way to help, life is messy, people are complex, but that should not prevent us from being open-hearted and open-handed.** Today we are dedicating to God the estimates of giving for 2018. If you have not decided yet or have not told us if you will be supporting our work as a church next year, I encourage you to do so.[[3]](#endnote-3) **The ways we are able to serve each other, and our community will either be made possible or limited by our collective giving.** Please join us in this important work. Amen.

1. Lauren Tyler Wright. *Giving – The Sacred Art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity*. (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008) p. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Annie Gildner and Trish Hamrick shared at the 8:30 a.m. service and Johnny Ware, Julie Littler, Annie Gildner and Trish Hamrick shared at the 10:00 a.m. service. You can hear their answers on the audio version of this sermon. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. You can give your Estimate of Giving for 2018 online at [www.nsumc.com](http://www.nsumc.com), click on 2018 Pledge, you can send an email to [Candace@nsumc.com](mailto:Candace@nsumc.com) with your Estimate of Giving or complete a paper commitment card and send it to the church office or put it in the offering plate. Any communication method will be confidential and will be handled with care. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)