

Generosity in Motion ~ November 2020



Hi there! I'm the Rev. Dean Brown who serves as one of the assistants to the bishop. I also serve as this synod's 'stewardship specialist,' which means if you would like to hold a conversation with someone regarding this faith practice, I would very much welcome the opportunity.

I have a question for you. *Where have you learned about or seen generosity in your life?*

It's a great theological question to ponder. It's a practical theological conversation to be held as well. I've seen and learned about it in a variety of places. Let me tell you about one of those times.

It was Christmas Eve. I had not been a pastor for very long, this being my third of fourth Christmas to preside over many Christmas Eve services. The first and largest Christmas Eve service had recently concluded and I was the last person in the building wrapping up a few end-of-worship details. And just after resetting the worship space, re-organizing my notes, even pushing around the vacuum a bit, I was -with no small amount of weariness- getting ready to lock the church doors until worship leaders and I returned later that evening for another round. And just then out of the cold, snowing, wintery night -an unkempt man walked in. He was wearing glasses, no hat, the snow flakes already having melted on his head causing his long hair to be both frizzled and matted in ways. He didn't look me in the eyes when he walked in. And I thought to myself, 'I guess my work is not done,' believing that an act of Christian charity would be requested. And that is when it happened.

Just as I began to think ahead about where my 'pastor's discretionary checkbook' was, that man - that soul who just passed through the doors- placed several twenty-dollar bills in my hand and kindly asked, 'Would you put these in the offering plate, Pastor?' And then he slipped back out into the night. I could do nothing but pause and ponder this good and unexpected thing which just happened and had a reverberating affect upon me. This was a night that I did not just learn about generosity. I experienced it; and it was an experience that seized me.

I experienced that there are so many souls yearning to give and share with the church so that it may fulfill its mission. I discovered that I do not always recognize beforehand where and from whom that generosity may flow. And I felt transformed -that is, encountering something I had already known at an even more profound level- with this type of generous outpouring being the great equalizer where there is neither benefactor nor beneficiary; just two people (in this case) beholding the face of Christ in one another (at least that is what I saw in him). And I encountered the generative nature of generosity through this soul's act of giving inspiring my own. It rubbed off!

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As we come closer to the national holiday of Thanksgiving, and as we enter the liturgical time of year when we celebrate Advent and Christmas, I encourage you -in worship, in council meetings, in small group gatherings of all types, in virtual coffee hours...I encourage you to share these stories with one another. It is a great exercise. For it is through remembering that others who have not known this joy begin to learn and practice it as well. It is through remembering that our own spiritual intention is reset, and the joy of giving and receiving is discovered yet again. It is a remembering where our faith becomes concretely active, carrying out and sharing in God's love for the world.

Thank you for your fellowship in the gospel.