



# Christ United Methodist Church

*Creating committed Christ-followers for the transformation of the world.*

Deuteronomy 8: 11-20  
1 Timothy 6: 11-12, 17-19

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## **“Generosity”**

So here is my version of the “I walked twenty miles to school in snow drifts up to here” story.

I had the considerable luxury of staying home while my children were young. Some long days I wondered if my children were better off for it, but that was what I did.

Their dad was a teacher who earned extra money by directing shows at the high school.

We were very careful about money. Things were tight.

I realized how tight things were in this way:

We were at Target.

My daughter Rachel was able to choose a new toothbrush.

As we were checking out, she couldn't have been more excited about that new toothbrush.

She said over and over as it was being scanned - Oh, mom and dad, thank you!!!!

I didn't think much of it until I saw the clerk respond to her excitement.

She took in my tow-headed little girl's thrilling over a new toothbrush and she must have wondered what kind life this wee one had and she said:

“Wow. I don't think I've ever checked for a child who was so excited about a toothbrush. That's pretty cool.”

Why do I tell you this story?

I tell you because I don't want to ever become so complacent and privileged that I forget what a new toothbrush can mean to a child -

My own or anyone's child.

The book of Deuteronomy shared with us today a strong message about remembering.

Remembering that everything we have? All things that we think are ours? All those things are flat-out gift from God.

The God who leads us through the literal and figurative deserts of life. The God who hears the cry of those crushed by oppression. The God who has taught us over and over and over again that our love of money or land or privilege will warp our souls and ruin our peace.

Our God speaks: "When you who were hungry have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them and your silver and gold is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Do not say "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth..."

Understand this:

We are made in the image of God.

God is generous beyond our ability to name or comprehend.

It's too big, the so-muchness that is our everyday lived reality.

What God is telling us is that we are to be generous in the ways that God is generous.

We are called to be generous images of the generous God who has given us all that we are and all that we have.

It's an amazing call. It assumes so much.

Do you remember Burt Reynolds? He was a long-time ago actor.

He starred in many movies, but one in particular might have a bit to teach us on this day.

The movie is called The End.

In the film, Burt Reynolds becomes despondent and decides to end all the pain by swimming out as far as he can until he is exhausted and can just let go and sink under the surface of the water.

He swims out. But after going under, he finds himself looking at the surface of the water - the dapple of sunlight and the blue of the wave-moving sky and he decides that he doesn't want to die after all.

He changes his mind.

As he breaks the surface of the water he screams: "I want to live! I want to live!"

He then begins to try to swim ashore, but it is a very long way. As he begins to swim he talks to God. He promises that he will obey all the ten commandments, but then he realizes that he doesn't know them so he promises to learn them and then in his panic he says

"Lord, if you get me through this, I will give you 80% of everything I have."

Time passes and he is still making progress, so much so that he can just barely see the shoreline. He's at risk, certainly, but as he continues to swim he feels his strength holding out pretty well and so he says to God:

"Lord, if you help me to get to shore alive I will give you 10% of my earnings."

Finally, he struggles to the place where he sees that he is just going to be able to make it to land and he says:

"Lord, let's just forget what I said before. I think I can make it from here on my own."

Here this:

Being generous is NOT about deal making with God.

Being generous because God is generous in the ways that God is generous because we are images of that generous God is not about making deals or earning our way to singing angel land.

We get to be generous because we have been so abundantly blessed. It's too painful to hold all that goodness.

We HAVE to share it because we know what it means to receive, don't we?

We've received skin and touch and children and love and fall leaves swirling and we have received the gift of God's love made flesh in Jesus the Christ and we want to live as images of the God who kneels at the feet of others and touches with tender care.

We give because we can. Because our hearts and souls demand that we give.

And it doesn't feel like we are being generous. When we give, it feels like we are being alive.

So, we give love and attention and care and we practice the hard-honest work of checking in with ourselves about what god it is we exactly worship.

The Burt Reynolds movie bit is no joke. Right?

Our culture and our arrogance can have us believing that we make it through on our own.

That is God-denying nonsense.

From 1 Timothy:

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that is really life.

This church exists in order that the life that is really life might be shared with all people.

Increasingly, this church is answering a call to share life that is really life with children and families in the greater Rochester area.

Our church feels called to open up a child care and family resource center called THRIVE!

Our church wants to provide support for people doing the holy and hard work of raising children who have all that they need to live whole and full lives.

Our church is called by the heart and gospel of Jesus the Christ to work to break the cycle of poverty that keeps too many in our community living the grinding stresses of scarcity. Food insecurity. Housing insecurity. Employment insecurity.

Children's bodies bear the scars that poverty carves into their souls. For the rest of their lives they carry those biological and psychic scars.

Those scars bear a witness this church is no longer willing to condone through silence and inaction.

So of course, we will take what we have been given and share it.

Dear Lord. We are rich!

We get to be - as one of our members put it recently - a church with a purpose.

Our purpose is to worship God with our hearts, our souls, our minds and we do that through celebrating the holy practice of generosity.

Because we can.

Because we can.

Because we are so grateful that we get to be generous in the way that our God is generous.

Because we don't ever want to become so complacent that we forget what a new toothbrush -or nurturing supportive care - can mean to a child.

Our own;

Or any other's.

Amen