

File: FRT Formed to be Generous

Dear friends in Christ, Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Years ago a comedian had a character where he was the preacher at “The Church of What’s Happening Now”. In one skit the preacher starts off softly by saying “IF THIS CHURCH IS GOING TO SERVE GOD IT’S GOT TO GET DOWN ON ITS KNEES AND CRAWL!!!”. And the audience who plays the congregation yelled back “Make it crawl preacher, make it crawl”. Then he amped it up a bit and said “AND ONCE THIS CHURCH HAS LEARNED TO CRAWL, ITS GOT TO GET UP ON ITS FEET AND WALK!!!” and the congregation amped it up as well “Make it walk preacher make it walk.” The preacher is really working now and says “AND ONCE THIS CHURCH HAS LEARNED TO WALK ITS GOT TO BEGIN TO RUN!!!” Make it run preacher, make it run! And now he really hits his stride “AND IN ORDER TO RUN ITS GOT TO REACH DEEP DOWN INTO POCKETS AND LEARN TO GIVE!!!” Not matching the preachers enthusiasm this time the congregation says “Make it crawl preacher, make it crawl.” Talk about dialing it back pretty quickly.

These past few weeks we’ve been digging into Scripture to discover the different ways God has formed us. One of the way The Lord has formed us is that a life of generosity is to be our response to what The Lord has done for us.

The passage from Genesis this morning is a great example. Jacob falls asleep with a rock as his pillow. In the dream there’s a ladder. Jacob doesn’t climb the ladder to God, instead angels go up and down the ladder and God makes the promise to Jacob that all peoples on earth will be blessed by him and the Lord will be with him and fulfill all of The Lord’s promises to

Jacob. It's one of the better known stories in The Bible and even if you don't know the story you might have heard of Jacob's ladder.

But the last part of the account is almost always overlooked because people get infatuated with the ladder and angels. Let me read for you the last three verses *“Then Jacob made a vow saying “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.”* In other words, Jacob took God at His word and promised to give a tenth-----or a tithe of all he had because of God's faithfulness—that was his natural response and he made a choice to live generously. Jacob like you and me have been formed by God to live generously.

Throughout the Bible we are reminded to remember The Lord and that we are created to live generously.

- Deuteronomy 8:18 “Remember The Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.
- Deuteronomy 12:6-7 “Bring your offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings...because the Lord your God has blessed you.”
- 2 Corinthians 8:7 “Just as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us, see that you excel in this grace of giving.”

- 2 Corinthians 9:11 “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

Yes we’ve been formed by God to live generously but it doesn’t come as naturally to us as the fact that we’ve been formed to pray. Even people who don’t go to church or even identify with Jesus but rather some generic kind of God or who call themselves spiritual but not religious pray. I mean it comes pretty naturally especially when we face a crisis or some kind of health issue or concern—we plead with God for help or healing. Or we’re up in the middle of the night praying like crazy about something in our lives. Yeah we’ve been formed by God to pray and it comes pretty naturally.

We’ve also been created to be generous but it doesn’t come quite as naturally. I suspect not too many of us wake up in the middle of the night and pace the floor pleading with God “Dear Lord, please help me figure out how much to give and give me the courage to take the next great step of faith in discovering that you’ve formed me to live generously.”

We all have different ideas about what it means to be generous that’s why the Bible talks so much about tithing or giving 10% and first fruits giving, that is giving back to God first--- rather than from what’s left over. But and now this is really important---God doesn’t ask us to engage in first fruits giving or tithe because The Lord needs the money. The Bible tells us “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it... and the Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the whole earth is His.”

Instead God calls us to give and live generously as an outward sign of our inward condition. A heart that belong to God rejoice in the opportunity to use what God has given them to worship Him.

There will never be much joy in our giving if we think of it as “paying our dues” or like paying our taxes---something we do out of obligation just to keep the building open and the bills paid. Are those important? Of course they are but our God given mission isn’t to keep the doors open and the bills paid. Our fundamental mission and what we are really about is “to Make disciples”. The fundamental DNA of the church and this one specifically is about Jesus and His people.

One of the things we Americans are proud of and rightfully so is our response when disasters strike. Whether it’s hurricanes, tornadoes, fires earthquakes or whatever people really step forward. Distributing the help isn’t always so smooth often because of the scale of the disaster—but people really do step forward. As followers of Jesus we are invited to have that generosity (not just when natural disasters strike) become a way of life as we live more fully into who the Lord has created us to be.

If you’ve picked up your stewardship packets and read the brochure and materials you’ve noted that over the last twelve years we as a congregation have been able to distribute over \$800,000 to ministries outside our walls. It’s possible that in 2019 that will cross the Million dollar threshold—Think about that over a million dollars just from this one congregation—Pretty remarkable. Could we have kept that here at SOC? Yes we could have. But we as a congregation know we’ve been created to live generously even though SOC isn’t supported by any outside group only through the offerings of those who call this their church home.

Have we been able to keep the doors open and pay the bills? Yes but most importantly what have we been able to do on behalf of Jesus for His children? Give a lot of children and adults in our community a perspective on faith that will carry them through good and bad times focused on Jesus. Through our support literally thousands of kids have been introduced to Jesus at WAPO. Through Lutheran social services we've helped the homeless, unwed mothers, helped provide homes for runaway teens and more. We've supported missionaries around the world, help start new churches, support local food banks and the foodbanks at our local schools, train and prepare pastors for ministering in the future, bring relief to places inflicted by natural disasters, provide school supplies for Children in need and the list goes on and on-- **READ CBPA CARD.**

We don't always think about it on Sunday mornings do we---and IT IS nice to have the lights on and the air conditioning and heating working... but we've literally made a difference in our community, nation and around the world for Christ....Honestly, what could be better than the experience of partnering with God and living generously? Yeah I could come up with a few cynical responses but in the depths of our being when we start living generously it brings great joy.

My personal experience in our own giving and the lives of so many I've spoken with over the years in this church and other churches is that if we wait for the perfect time to move from make it crawl—make it crawl to make it run—make it run to take that next leap in our generosity there never is a perfect time. There will always be reasons why not to take that leap of faith.

And moving from crawling to running does involve sacrifice because it could always be used to do something for ourselves. Yet I've never met a person who gave joyfully and lived

generously who didn't continue that for the rest of their life. And when they took that first step from crawling to running they discovered that what at first they thought was a great sacrifice ended up being one of the greatest joys of their life and they never stop. You know why? Because they discovered there is something about living into the Biblical truth that we are created to live generously that frees us from being in bondage to money and stuff, from being a slave to the money we earn and stuff we have to letting it be a tool for doing great things in this community and around the world for Jesus and living into being the person The Lord has created us to be.

My prayer for my household and yours is that as we consider our gifts for 2018 to the Lord's ministry through Servant of Christ is that together we will take the next step in our giving and capture the joy of living generously and that together we make it run.

Let us pray...