

GENEROSITY AS TOLD THROUGH THE PARABLES OF JESUS



CLARITY

Year Two

+ *courage*

Devotional Guide



Jesus told through parables for clarity and simplicity, and to give them new courage to live toward God's Kingdom desires.

We all need a reminder sometimes about how a simple and focused commitment can make a profound impact, especially when we steward our money, our time, our power, our relationships, and our lives to the tune of what God hopes for.

Join us for this series of generosity through October.

OCTOBER 8TH
SMALL BEGINNINGS

OCTOBER 15TH
WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

OCTOBER 22ND
LETTING GO

OCTOBER 29TH
TRUE COMMUNION

OCTOBER 8TH

SMALL BEGINNINGS

"Why does Jesus replace the mighty cedar tree, a symbol of power, arrogance, and empire, with a weed? Would the crowds have understood God's mustard-seed empire to be like Jack's beanstalk, reaching against all expectations, up to heaven and bring all the nations low? Is the kingdom of heaven a surprise that brings redemption, or a threat that must be eradicated, or both?"

-Stanley Saunders



"Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'"

Mark 4:30-32



FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

We find this parable in four versions (the three Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas). Some place the sowing of the mustard seed in a field, others in a garden. No (Jewish) person would intentionally sow mustard seeds in a garden—not only because the plant is wild and hearty, but because of the pungent properties of mustard. Where one culture saw this small seed as a nuisance to be avoided, the Romans, however, considered it beneficial for a host of gastrointestinal and other processes. Jesus tells this parable to show us how subversive the Kingdom of God really is. God plants this weed in the world on purpose.

1. In light of this parable, how are we invited to treat the “weeds” in our lives?

2. Where might one find the hope in this parable? Think especially in terms of those of us who feel like tiny seeds in a world that only trades in “big” things, for those who feel like dispensable failures rather than those who boast of glamorous success.

3. List and reflect on/discuss ways in which you can sow good seeds at home, at work, and in your church/community.

PRACTICE

ACT OF KINDNESS

What is one small thing you might do this week to bless someone else without being asked? Can you ask them to “pay it forward” to another person?

OCTOBER 15TH WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

"These too are not to be buried underneath a bushel, but rather employed for service of the master and the kingdom, for the benefit of all. This story is about vocation for more than it is about investment."

-Robert McClellan



"So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground.
See, here is what belongs to you."

Matthew 25:25

FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Contrary to our instinctive reaction, the employer was very generous. He trusted his workers with a substantial sum, not telling them how to invest it or offering any significant restrictions on them. They were left on their own, with marvelous freedom and a generous resource. Like the employer, God asks only one thing for giving us the gold of life: Use, in the best way you can, what the King has entrusted you.

1. Share why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God gives all people the same opportunity."

2. Do you think the slave who invested one talent was timid? Why or why not?

3. A critical question for Jesus' followers as it is now: What does it mean to live into the gifts God has provided?

PRACTICE

SHARING GIFTS

Ask a spouse, child, friend, or parent what he or she sees as gifts that God has given you. Thank God for these gifts and think about ways to use these gifts on a daily basis.

OCTOBER 22ND

LETTING GO

"When we truly enjoy God's unlimited generosity, we will be grateful for what our brothers and sisters receive. Jealousy will simply have no place in our hearts."
-Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*



"Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

Luke 12:14-15

FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Greed is an expression of human desire. Perhaps we desire so much at times because at the heart of our own desires is not fulfilled. We strive to gain more things, to hoard more possessions in order to surround ourselves with plenty only to find out that these things have no heart and cannot desire nor love us in return. In this parable, Jesus depicts someone who is so spiritual that he talks with his soul and nevertheless misses the heart of his aching. It is a reminder that even today it's possible to use even spiritual devices in unworthy or self-serving ways. How can we escape the pitfalls that make this remarkable businessman who, even with the best of intentions, got lost in himself?

1. Why might the troubled ones in Jesus' parables be most often spiritual people? What does this tell us?
2. In your own words, explain what greed means, and how a person guards against it. Is greed ever good? Explain your answer.
3. Aside from financial wealth, what makes people rich? Can you share a personal experience of experiencing this?

PRACTICE

DEACCUMULATION

Give five things away that would be of value to someone else. If you have something nice that you're sure someone would value, bless them with it. Notice how you feel in the simplification of your life even through small steps.

OCTOBER 29TH

TRUE COMMUNION

"The real danger facing us is to distrust our desire for communion. It is a God-given desire without which our lives lose their vitality and our hearts grow cold."

-Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now*



"Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame."
"Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room."

Luke 14:1, 7-14

FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

God's passionate yearning for communion with us and with all that God created. God desires that the whole of creation might be given the chance to experience the freedom of true spiritual communion. As we gather our resources together—time, attention, money, and other gifts—we discover the joy of our common yearning. Churches and charitable organizations must realize that community is one of the greatest gifts they have to offer. When we ask for and invite participation, it means that we offer a new fellowship, a new family, and a new way of belonging.

1. Give your own definition of humility. Why is humility a good quality? List some of the reasons people may lack humility.

2. Reflect on or discuss what you believe Jesus' ideal dinner party guest would look like. Who would be included?

3. How does spiritual communion manifest itself concretely? Tell about a time when you have felt that in your life.

PRACTICE

Pray about your commitment through prayers, presence, service, witness, and financial gifts to the Vision of University United Methodist Church. Prepare yourself to offer that commitment on October 29th in Sunday morning worship.

COMMITMENT



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