

Sacrificial Living/Sacrificial Giving  
I Chronicles 29:1-9  
Luke 19:1-4

Begin singing a song: #710 We Lift Our Voices

Confession: I have been uncomfortable about this this sermon since being coached by our Horizons Stewardship consultant about topics for a sermon series during the campaign.

First, I suppose, I get prickly when I'm advised about my sermon topics, but second because advising, preaching, encouraging, (someone is sure to say *pushing* "sacrificial giving" is out of my comfort zone in proclaiming, and maybe I'm assuming it's out of your comfort zone in listening. Nevertheless, sacrificial giving and sacrificial living is a completely Biblical concept, illustrated in numerous texts (Widow of Zarephath with her oil, the boy with loaves and fishes, Zaccheus ) and an integral part of growing as a disciple of Jesus. I became more convicted of this as my sermon study progressed, so I'm asking you to jump right in with me.

I'm going to tell some stories on myself.

It was Tuesday morning, I was already grumpy. I was due to meet one of our elders at church to carpool to Presbytery and I had decided to stop for a cup of coffee in hopes of elevating my attitude with an extra dose of caffeine. Alas, as I pulled out of the driveway I looked down at the dashboard and noticed I was one tiny square away from being out of gas. I'd have to buy gas before getting on the highway. So much for coffee.

A few moments later, my ten gallon Prius tank is almost full—and I see a woman poking her head around the gas pump. She greets me with a sheepish look on her face and a "good morning". She's a stranger. "I'm really embarrassed to have to do this, but I left my wallet at home and I can't pay for my gas and I need two dollars so I can get back home. Do you have \$2 so I can at least get home to get my wallet." "Oh please", my not best self said to myself. I am very familiar with requests for cash. Every pastor is. We get jaded. This may have been an absolutely legitimate situation. Or it might be a scam. Remember I said I

was grumpy? In a hurry? On my way to a church meeting? After shoving aside the judgments, stereotypes, annoyances and previous experiences discovering I had been “taken”, I asked her to wait a second. I finished putting that 10<sup>th</sup> gallon in my tank, reached in the car for my purse, spotted a \$5 bill and handed it to her. She received it with overwhelming thanks. I said, no problem, pass it forward, and we exchanged “Have a good days”. And “God bless you”. I’ll never know if the story was true, but I wasn’t going to say no and head off to a church meeting.

Five dollars. I had it to spare. (Especially since I hadn’t gotten that coffee ) I gave it because I had more money than time at that moment. I gave it with suspicion. Joylessly.

A few hours later at the Presbytery meeting in the historic Presbyterian church in Edwardsburg (that’s near Niles) the offering had just been announced. As Presbytery offerings are, it was for a good cause, a refugee resettlement organization in Lansing. I reached for my purse. I had a twenty and I had a one. (The five had already found a new home). I recalled previous Presbytery meetings when I was caught with the same dilemma. I took out the twenty. Second opportunity for giving that morning. I did an internal shrug. I was willing; not exactly eager. Sacrificial giving?

Yes, I’m human. I did a lot of self talk through the day to finally come to a place of gratitude that I COULD give what I did, but my first instinct in both cases was annoyance, reluctance. Irritation.

I tell these above stories on myself—to model that we are all on a learning curve as disciples. Tuesday was not my finest day for sacrificial living OR giving.

Sacrifice: something valued which is given up for something or someone of more value. Personal time for family time. A personal hit for teammate’s score. An accumulation of shoes for a case of food for the Empty the Pallet.

You’ve heard two Biblical stories about giving—one a story about a rich man, a king, King David. He had a vision—a temple, a house for God to replace the God-in-a-Trailer arrangement which had been

moving along with the Israelite people since the days of Moses. In order to provide a place of honor and stability for God, David funds the temple: Gold. Silver. Bronze. Wood. Jewels, Precious stones. Marble.

Not only does David give from the state treasury, but from his personal riches, his “stash for the future”. All of it together, about 60 million dollars.

Is that sacrificial giving?

After giving his gifts, David, like a wise and effective leader, extends a challenge to the people. (Did he have a capital campaign consultant?) I Chronicles 29:5 “Who then will offer willingly consecrating themselves today to the Lord?”

They stepped up and made their freewill offerings... that is, the offerings above and beyond their normal giving. The text tells us that the people celebrated, having given willingly, freely. They blessed God. They ate and drank before their God with joy.

~~Is this sacrificial giving? Can we answer that without knowing the size of their gift or the percentage of their wealth they gave? Or is it sacrificial because they gave to a holy cause? Or because it resulted in joy?~~

The second story? Five hundred years later... in a temple rebuilt after destruction of Solomon’s temple, Jesus is not only people-watching but also people -listening in the temple. There in the large courtyard called the Court of the Women, (women were not allowed in every part of the temple) were thirteen wooden boxes outfitted with trumpet shaped bronze funnels ready to receive gifts from the worshippers. There was no paper money... only coins of various sizes and metals so as you might imagine, the gifts of a wealthy person, larger, in size and quantity, made more noise, thus the amount of the gift was noticed by everyone milling about providing immediate positive feedback for those who need such affirmation. But the noise following the gift of the poor widow, (two tiny coins, copper, not gold, not silver) was barely noticed... except by Jesus who draws our attention to the absence of metal against metal. But given the status of widows in that day, this giver had no accumulated wealth. She represents

all those who literally don't know where their next meal, or next month's rent will come from. The story suggests that these two cents are all that she has. And she gave them away.

Sacrificial giving, holy giving? Or just sheer foolishness? No comment about how she felt about it.

In the Message version, "All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all!"

I'm reminded of our Vanuatu marriage where we were celebrated and gifted by some of the poorest people on earth who wouldn't have dreamed of coming to our wedding and reception without a gift.

=One nautilus shell retrieved from the reef—from Albert--

=Two Venus cone shells from Kalsere, workman at the school.

=A crude cutting board fashioned from local wood from another.

=Five blue plates from the Chinese shop.

Henri Nouwen writes "Our humanity comes to its fullest bloom in giving. We become beautiful people when we give whatever we can give: a smile, a handshake, a kiss, an embrace, a word of love, a present, a part of our life...all of our life."

(Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*)

So where are we?

A sacrificial gift is one beyond what is expected, or promised.

A sacrificial gift is given freely; not under compulsion.

A sacrificial gift is given wholeheartedly; without limit.

A sacrificial gift given yields joy, evoking celebration.

Sacrificial giving doesn't happen automatically. It begins with a decision to live a sacrificial life. To actually act like our lives and our goods come from God.

Author Steven King, of all people, speaking at the Vassar College commencement a number of years ago told the story of having, two years earlier, been lying in a ditch by a country road, seriously injured after being hit by a van as he walked beside the road. "I had a MasterCard in my wallet, but when you're lying in the ditch with broken glass in your hair, no one accepts MasterCard." On that day and in the following months, he got a painful but important insight into many of life's simple truths: "We came in naked and broke. We may be dressed when we go out, but we're just as broke." He drew this sobering conclusion: "Warren Buffet? Going to go out broke. Bill Gates? Going to go out broke. Tom Hanks? Going out broke ... Steve King? Broke. You guys? Broke. Not a crying dime. 'I'm aware of the time passin' by, they say in the end it's the blink of an eye.' That's how long. Just the blink of an eye'."

Then he added these words to that graduating class that sound like he had been reading the words of King David:

"I want you to consider making your lives one long gift to others, and why not? All you have is on loan anyway.

Interesting. He didn't say, if you make a lot of money... be generous with it. He didn't say, no matter how much you make, don't grasp onto your money.

He said, make your lives one long gift.

That's sacrificial living. Consecrating, making holy, not our money, but our living. Making our lives one long gift.

We Lift Our Voices.

I've been singing this song for years. What I didn't know was the source of the lyrics. It's this story about David and people giving gifts for the temple. And, Paul's words in Romans, 12:1-2 (from the message) <sup>1-2</sup> So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Make your lives one long gift.

Okay, so that's a tall order. But it's not mine, it's not some capital campaign consultant's advice, it's not Steve King, or King David, or the Poor Widow in the temple. At its core, sacrificial living is what it means to follow Jesus.

God's greatest gift, sacrificial gift, was as Paul writes to the Philippians, "emptying Godself being found in human form—as Jesus of Nazareth."

And Jesus, humbled, obedient to love's demands, he makes of his life one long gift—to the cross and beyond into life again. It's Jesus saying to us: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (Matthew 16)

And he's the one we say we intend to follow. We become most like him when we empty ourselves of our self-indulgence, our pride, and our illusion of self sufficiency and security. Our suspicions at the gas station when someone asks for money.

So my conclusion this morning is not to ask you to fill out a pledge card. There's time for that later. —it is to contemplate what you need to do to take a one more step toward living a God-like, Jesus modeled sacrificial life- a life dedicated to the Holy One. One Long Gift.