

“Extravagant Generosity” – John 3:16-21 – Rev Jeff Childs

1. God’s Extravagant Generosity. The first few words of the well-known passage from John’s Gospel clearly states that the way God shows love for the world is by giving. *For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.* (John 3:16) God gives because God loves. **Giving is part of the character of God.** In his book *Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, Bishop Schnase wrote: “We give because we are made in the image of God, whose essential nature is giving. God’s extravagant generosity is part of our essential nature as well.” Extravagant Generosity is an expression of your heart.

2. Our reply is our example. *Show them the proof of your love and the reason we are so proud of, in such a way that the churches can see it.* (2 Corinthians 8:24) The entire teaching of this letter in chapters 8 and 9 is about giving, and more specifically giving to a special offering for the poor in Jerusalem. In a couple weeks I will elaborate on this situation, but for today know that Paul understood this situation and it shapes the dialogue with the churches in a couple of his letters. In Acts 15 we read of a meeting in Jerusalem between Paul and the other apostles where it seems to be worked out that Paul would preach to the Gentiles and Peter and others to the Jews. The new Gentile Christians do not need to first become circumcised and become Jewish to become Christian, something Paul believed strongly. Now Paul, wrote it this way, *so it was agreed that we would go to the Gentiles, while they continue to go to the people who were circumcised. They asked only that we would remember the poor, which was certainly something I was willing to do.* (Galatians 2:9b-10)

Paul then writes to the churches he has established asking them to help with this offering *for the poor* and develop plans for collecting it and returning it to Jerusalem with him on his next trip. He writes and encourages the Greeks to give generously as they have offered to do. He seems to have bragged to the Macedonians about them and they too have risen to the opportunity to give. Now he writes to the Corinthians to encourage them to be ready to collect the offering so if some Macedonians should come along with him on his journey, they would not be embarrassed by not being ready or generous. For Paul the generosity of the churches was a measure of the vitality of their faith. Their reply to this offering was their example for others. Paul concludes that giving is proof (or evidence) of our love of God. When we truly accept the generous gift of God’s love, our only possible response is to live and give generously. **Is it possible to love God without giving?**

3. Pay It Forward. *Pay It Forward* was a movie back in 2000 based on the novel of the same name by Catherine Ryan Hyde. It starred Haley Joel Osment as a 7th grade boy who launches a good-will movement from a homework assignment in his social studies class to devise and put into action a plan that will change the world for the better. We are here this morning because Jesus paid it forward through his teachings, miracles, life, death and resurrection. The apostle Paul and others have been recipients of the gift of God’s grace and have passed it on down through the generations. And now, as we make our commitment next week it will lead us into the future of the fourth quarter of this year, into 2025 and beyond. We commit ourselves to God and to one another as members of this

body of Christ we call our church family. What we do for the mission and ministry of the church will impact the children, youth and young adults who will become the backbone, the hands and feet of the church of tomorrow.

Do you imagine in their wildest dreams that those who established this congregation nearly 170 years ago could have imagined Mt Carmel UMC of 2024? We stand here upon their shoulders and now raise up our children and youth in the faith that they will one day lift future generations even higher. We may be the second act of a 3-act play, or maybe the second runner in a 4-person relay race. Our job is to set the stage for the next act, or to not drop the baton as we get it into the next hand for the next leg of this race of faith. I invite you today to commit yourself to play your part in the here and now for the glory of God and pay it forward for the furthering of God's kingdom of tomorrow! Alleluia and Amen.

Giving Is a Gift of God

Jeffrey B. Childs 9/17/2024

Giving is a gift of God,
Bestowed upon each of us.
That we might learn so to give,
By the greatest gift – Jesus!

In all we say and do,
We show faith's vitality.
May the Lord be greatly praised,
By our generosity.

We have received God's blessing,
For Jesus paid it forward.
Gratefully we pass it on,
That God's gift journeys onward.