

“Gratitude, Giving, Shining”

John 6:5-13 & Isaiah 58:1-12

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our senses to your presence. Amen.

A reading from the gospel of John: **John 6:5-13 NLT** “Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, Jesus asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” Jesus was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do. Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!” Then Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?” “Tell everyone to sit down,” Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward Jesus did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.” So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.” The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Legend has it that a little girl stood near a small church from which she had been turned away because it was too crowded. I can't go to Sunday School, she sobbed to the pastor as he walked by. Seeing her shabby, unkempt appearance, the pastor guessed the reason and, taking her by the hand, took her inside and found a place for her in the class. The child was so happy that they found room for her. She was filled with gratitude. That night in her makeshift bed in the tiny rundown apartment she wondered about other children who have no place to worship Jesus. Two years later, she died. Her parents called for the kindhearted pastor who had befriended their daughter to handle the final arrangements. As her poor little body was being moved, a worn and crumpled red purse was found which seemed to have been rummaged from some trash dump. Inside was found 57 cents and a note, scribbled in her handwriting, which read: *This is to help build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday School.* For two years she had saved for this offering of love. When the pastor tearfully read that note, he knew instantly what he would do. Carrying this note and the cracked, red pocketbook to the pulpit, he told the story of her unselfish love and devotion. He challenged his deacons to get busy and raise enough money for the larger building. A newspaper learned of the story and published it. It was read by a wealthy realtor who gave the church a parcel of land. Checks came from far and wide. Within five years, the little girl's gift had increased to a quarter of a million dollars. Her grateful giving had paid large dividends. Today, Temple Baptist Church in Philadelphia has a spacious Christian education wing. Temple University educates thousands of students. Good Samaritan Hospital heals numerous people. All gratefully built with a hope that no child, no person, will ever be left out, denied food, shelter, clothes, education, or medical care. The church gratefully displays a picture of the little girl who sacrificially gave beside the grateful Pastor Russell Conwell.

The gospel of John tells of a young boy. He was eager to learn from Jesus. Not wanting to miss a single word from Jesus he quickly packed a lunch and joined the crowd that walked out into the wilderness and climbed up a hill to listen to Jesus. After a morning of teaching and healing, Jesus looked out at the crowd of about 14,000 people that is a few thousand more people than all the people in North St. Paul. Their eyes were glazed over, between the long walk and the excitement of the morning the crowd was famished. Jesus asked Phillip to serve them lunch. Phillip grew up in the closest town of Bethsaida about nine miles away. Immediately, Phillip knew of two major obstacles first it would cost about a year’s wage to serve 14,000 people lunch and they had almost no money, second even if they went to every food source in the area there still would be nowhere near enough food. The boy still listening intently to Jesus and his disciples overheard, and he was so grateful that he shinned with generosity. In those days, children were at the very bottom of the social ladder. A boy was not to even get too close to a teacher not alone speak a word, yet the boy came up to Jesus and offered to give his entire lunch five small barley loaves and two tiny fish. Jesus had everyone sit down, thanked God for this boy’s courage, generosity and lunch and then multiplied the meal. It was a delicious lunch, people had seconds, some even had thirds. Jesus invited the people to eat even more for there were twelve heaping baskets of fish and bread remaining.

A teenage girl was ecstatic when a loving man, from a wonderful family that she had been dating just asked her to marry him. Her mind was flooded with wedding plans, where they would live, and finding a house. She daydreamed about their children and the carpentry shop they would open together. She loved reading the Bible, going

to worship, and praying so she ran to her room to gratefully praise God for her blessings. She sensed that God had a plan for her life that was much different than her dreams. She realized she would have a son, not by Joseph rather by the Holy Spirit. She was immediately concerned and she heard God tell her not to be afraid for the son's name will be Jesus, meaning, God saves. Mary responded I am the Lord's servant and I am willing to accept whatever God wants, then she burst into a joyful song of gratitude. Mary's song begins **"My soul magnifies the Lord!"** Mary's soul was filled with gratitude. She declared that she would continue to give, magnifying, increasing, enlarging, amplifying, expanding, shining God's love and blessings. Other translations have Mary singing, "I'm bursting with God-news; I'm dancing the song of my Savior God."

Three stories of grateful giving, of ordinary people, like us except probably all of us have a lot more wealth, easier lifestyle, and more possessions than most of them. Two were young children and one a teenager. All of them were grateful for what they had, for the blessings they had received from God, and gave generously to bless others. A pastor grateful for the opportunity to serve, was observant, compassionate, hospitable, and provided belonging for a poor outcast. A Sunday school teacher grateful for the opportunity to teach, eagerly welcomed another. A grateful little girl filled with joy by others accepting her, saved to give a few pennies to the church. Deacons grateful for opportunities to serve, seized the moment to expand love. A realtor grateful for their success, gave a parcel of land. Numerous grateful people inspired by the grateful giving of others, gave to the cause. A young boy grateful for the means, ability and foresight to pack lunch, generously shared. Jesus gratefully gave thanks, before multiplying food and giving abundance, more than could be enjoyed, to everyone. A crowd of 14,000 grateful for a meal, gave space for everyone to sit down and was patient as the meal was shared. Disciples grateful to serve Jesus and the crowd, gave by distributing the food. A grateful teenage girl gave of her womb and parenting to raise Jesus the savior of everyone. A grateful step parent gave of his home and nurtured Jesus in his carpentry shop to raise Jesus, the resurrection and life of the cosmos. Each of them was grateful and undeterred by how little they were able to give in the face of overwhelming need. Their grateful gifts in relation to the need appeared trivial, insignificant, like a single drop of water in the vast ocean. Yet, they gratefully, joyfully gave hoping, dreaming, trusting that God would somehow multiply their gift to meet the need and do the impossible. Fifty-seven cents built the mega Temple Baptist Church, Temple University and Good Samaritan Hospital. Five small loaves and two tiny fish fed 14,000 people with 12 baskets of leftovers. Mary gave her body, putting all her dreams on hold so that Jesus can save us all and in time make all our pure dreams come true.

Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Set yourself earnestly to discover what you are made to do, and then give yourself passionately to the doing of it."

Today, we with gratitude dedicate our gifts to God. Our gifts will have a ripple effect out into the world doing amazing things. Our grateful giving of ministry for our children and youth will shape the future. Many Sundays we have 13 children who are discipled by three of our teenagers. Our grateful giving to different missions will satisfy hearts and warm souls speeding the day when the world lives in peace. Our grateful giving enables worship and music inspiring us to magnify the Lord, to arise and shine. In addition to this Sunday morning service, we have our evening *Seasons* service with our praise band. Our grateful giving to the larger Presbyterian Church advocates for equality, freedom, and human rights for all. Our grateful giving provides food, clothes, education, housing, health care, and water to those in desperate need. Our grateful giving provides a safe building for a variety of community groups, Faith Christian Home Educators and El Shadai. Our grateful giving empowers people to serve, to speak God's healing word to those hurting, encouraging word to those struggling, comforting word to those mourning, guiding word to those disoriented, forgiving word to those laden with guilt, loving word to those alone and delightful word to those rejoicing.

We are in the season of thanksgiving. Be grateful and challenge yourself to generously give. Perhaps pick a different item in your home to be grateful for each day and decide to generously give. Perhaps gratefully count your books and give by reading to someone. Perhaps gratefully count your shoes and give by going for a walk with someone. Perhaps gratefully count the rooms in your house and give a certain amount of money per room to Houses for Haiti. Perhaps gratefully count each item of food in your house and give food to the hungry. Perhaps gratefully count every friend and give of your time to mentor someone. Perhaps gratefully count every screen in your home and give a certain amount of time per screen volunteering. Perhaps be grateful for each person who has taught you and give a certain amount of money for each teacher to Remember Niger. Perhaps gratefully count every item of clothes and give hats and mittens to the mitten tree that will be put up in 3 weeks. Perhaps gratefully count every wheel and give a ride to someone.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims: **Isaiah 58:1-12 NLT "Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Do not be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day**

and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. ‘We have fasted before you!’ they say. ‘Why aren’t you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves and you do not even notice it!’ “I will tell you why!” I respond. “It is because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord? “No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them and do not hide from relatives who need your help. “Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ God will quickly reply. “Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a **rebuilder of community and a restorer of homes.**” The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Be a grateful giver and you will shine. Join the world in grateful giving dispersing darkness so all will enjoy radiant loving light. Amen