

Generous

1 Timothy 6:6-19

If you were to pay close attention to advertising today you would get a pretty clear picture of what marks a successful life. To be successful is to be wealthy. To be successful is not to have wrinkles. To be successful is to have a hot partner. These goals and others like them focus us on external qualities – the size of our bank account, the ability to access skin defoliants and the ability never to age past an acceptable “hotness” quotient. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these things. Wealth is a wonderful asset to have. Having beautiful firm skin is a wonderful asset to have. Being “hot,” well – that goes without saying. Behind the pursuit of each of these assets is a danger. For physical appearance the poison is that we link our self-worth to a temporary human form that will inevitably age and change. For wealth the poison is greed. Nothing seems to blind us more to our common life together than the insatiable greed for more. It doesn't have to be that way. We can appreciate beauty without it being the only quality we value. We can accumulate wealth without it leading to greed... but it seems it is only possible if we know the antidote to the potential poison. Why is it that some beautiful people are able to find graciousness in their appearance and others are obnoxious? Why is it that wealth can lead to greed in so many while others have found a way to use their fortune to make the world a better place? What quality is different in those two realities? The difference is the presence of poison.

A couple of weeks ago I preached from Luke's parables about the lost coin and the lost sheep and made the connection that God considers us precious and therefore offers grace whenever we find ourselves in situations where we don't know what to do next. The qualities that mark a disciple begin with the recognition that we are precious to God. Once we have internalized that reality, our lives become generous. [Generosity is the antidote to the poison of greed.](#) It is as simple as $a+b=c$.

This is not the usual assumption of $a+b=c$. Usually, we get a different message from life – i.e. if you are attractive plus you know the right people you gain privilege. Or maybe, you have an education and you have contacts so you become wealthy. The $a+b$ equation rarely ends up with “c” being an outcome of generosity. Yet this was the way of Jesus and in our text from the first letter to Timothy we have Paul passing similar meaning on to his protégé. We give out of what we have received. As we are blessed, we bless others. It is the way we help others discover that they too are precious and it is the way to overcome the poison of greed.

But Pastor Paul, you might say, I'm not wealthy. I guess I don't have to worry about greed. Only people like Bill Gates or Oprah Winfrey or Rush Limbaugh

have to worry about that. I live paycheck to paycheck. I barely scrape by. Or maybe you think to yourself, I have a comfortable life – nothing too fancy (**I mean we are Minnesotans!**) – just enough to have a good life. So greed couldn't be poisoning my life. **If you're not living the antidote, you're affected by the poison.** If generosity is not flowing from you – through how you use your resources, how you treat others, how you treat the earth, what legacy your existence on this earth for these few short years will leave behind – if generosity is not the outcome of your life then you have been poisoned by greed.

“But I don't feel poisoned! I feel fine. I'm living my life like everyone else.” Greed is a subtle killer. It kills our compassion. It kills our empathy. It kills our kindness. It kills our humanity. It rarely manifests itself simply as the miser hoarding his or her money in a dark room chuckling to one's self about the shrewdness of one's riches. It more often manifests by simply tainting our ability to make the world a better place with **the lie that what I have to offer the world has no significance. That's an easier poison to swallow.**

A gift by definition is something that is given. If you have a gift of a skill and you are not using that skill to make your world better, you have been infected by the poison. If you have the gift of experience and you are not sharing your experience with others who might learn from you, you have diminished the world and your life has poisoned. If you are a resource that could make the ministry and work of All God's Children more effective, more successful, more passionate, more far-reaching – and you are not using your resources here or anywhere – the effects of the poison are tainting your life. The antidote is generosity.

Pastor, this is sounding like one of those give more money to the church sermons. Here's what I want you to know about all of us gathered in this room just today – not counting all the others who are often gathered in this room with us who might not be here today. **Put your gifts to use where you feel passion for something.** If it is here, put it here. If you have other passions as well, put your generosity there too. If it is a cause, put it there. If it is an organization, put it there. **There is enough giftedness in this room right now to change the world.** I put the bulk of my resources here because I am passionate about the vision of All God's Children, but know there is plenty to go around. There is not a scarcity of resources in our world today. There is a scarcity of generosity. The stock market crashed not because people didn't have money. Investors were afraid and stockbrokers got greedy. Children go hungry on the streets of Minneapolis every night not because we don't have enough food. It is because our generosity doesn't include them. Homeless teens aren't selling their bodies to get a place to sleep and shower because there aren't enough homes. It is because our generosity hasn't included them. **It is a lie**

that what you have to offer the world has no significance. It is a poison that is only cured by the antidote of generosity.

So to answer the question about whether this is a sermon about money, know this – it is about that and so much more. Last Sunday the Generosity Committee met for the first time and it was wonderful to see those people gathered around that table excited about investing their time, energy and resourcefulness into helping this congregation grow and reach its potential. The Generosity Committee is modeling generosity. Today we consecrate the Nominating Committee who will give of their energy, time, and expertise to make sure that we have qualified and skilled leaders serving on the Board of Directors. Between now and November they will work countless hours recruiting, interviewing, praying and coming to agreement around a slate of qualified nominees. The Nominating Committee members are modeling generosity. This week Jackie Zurn and Nicky Simon-Burton helped me interview seven wonderful applicants for our Director of Outreach position. OMG, what an amazing pool of people we had who offered their gifts to the work of this church. I wish I could have hired half of them. They were that good. This new Outreach effort will help all of us channel our generosity into parts of our community that we might never have touched before and that is so exciting to me. We celebrate wonderful worship each Sunday which is only possible because of the generosity of the worship folks and the technology folks and the music folks and the nursery folks and the deacons who give generously of their time, energy, skill and resources to create an opportunity that all of us might encounter the Presence of God. **We are inoculated with the antidote to greed and fear and shame every time we are generous with the gifts of our lives. Don't believe me? Try it.** Put something extra in the plate. Go out of your way to help somebody else. Spend an extra minute telling someone how important they are to you. Practice the antidote. It starts in this room. There are enough of us in this room right now to begin the inoculation. Imagine how the world would be different when all of us do it.

Sources:

www.homileticonline.com “Why Church? Reason Three: Money Matters” September 2010.