

## ***Extraordinary Generosity***

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen.  
[Psalm 19:14]

Today's Gospel lesson is about the well-known *Parable of the Rich Fool*, where Jesus – when asked to arbitrate a dispute between two brothers over the division of their family's inheritance – instead uses this instance as a teachable moment to talk about the folly of greed and covetousness; that God did not intend that our lives should be devoted to the accumulation of wealth; and that we are not blessed by God to hoard our wealth to ourselves, but rather, we are blessed by God to be a blessing in the lives of others, and in doing so, we are blessed to be a part of building the kingdom of God.

Now I don't believe that Jesus was saying that we should not engage in prudent and responsible financial planning and stewardship of our own resources, so that we can adequately see to our own needs and those of our families now and in the future, or that we should give away every last dollar we have. On the contrary, Jesus wanted us to have our priorities in order: by being blessed by God to be a blessing in the lives of others and builders of the kingdom of God; and was counseling against devoting one's life exclusively to the gathering and accumulation of wealth and becoming a slave to money. As St. Matthew said in his discourse on *Teachings in Practical Piety* (Matthew 6:24), "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other." St. Matthew ends this portion of his discourse by saying, "You cannot serve God and wealth."

There are many ways in which we can – as described in Proverbs 3:9-10 – be a blessing to others with the "first fruits of our increase," and in so doing, be blessed to be builders of the kingdom of God. As I was preparing today's sermon, I came across several very inspiring stories of extraordinary selfless generosity, which not only blessed the lives of those upon whom the gifts were bestowed, but also blessed the lives of those who bestowed the gifts. These extraordinary acts of selfless generosity include:

- A crowdfunding campaign started by a 19 year old college student in February 2015 that raised more than \$350,000 to purchase a car for a 56-year old Detroit, Michigan factory worker who had to walk 21-miles and take two busses daily to get to his \$10.55 per hour factory job, leaving him time for only two-hours of sleep each night. The Ford dealership did not charge the man for the car he wanted to purchase, and instead gave him a new 2015 Ford Taurus. The factory workers also received free financial coaching from several financial advisers on how to handle his new-found good fortune.

- A crowdfunding campaign started by a person who witnessed a homeless young man spending hours one day pushing strangers' cars that had become stuck in a Colorado Springs snow storm. The crowdfunding campaign raised more than \$22,000 for the homeless man. One of the crowdfunding donors commented that "the world needs more people like this young man."
- A grocery store customer who approached an Oklahoma stay-at-home mom in line in front of her who was about to pay the bill for her family's Thanksgiving dinner, tapped her on the shoulder and said, "Ma'am, I am going to pay for your groceries," and stepped in and swiped her credit card, paying for the groceries. The stay-at-home mom shared the story on Facebook and said her friends said they were inspired to do the same thing.
- And, a third-grade teacher in Dorchester, Massachusetts, who after winning a \$150,000 cash prize in a "Wish for Others" contest sponsored by Capitol One Bank, stating in her entry, that her wish that was each of her students would leave for their December break with a book in hand and writing that "their love for reading is contagious," donated her cash prize to her school. Capitol One was inspired too, because the bank donated three books to each of the teacher's students. Dorchester's Mayor also honored the teacher at a City Hall meeting.

We here at Grace Church, as *A School for Discipleship and Stewardship* and *A Community for Healing and Outreach*, also understand the importance of being blessed by God to be a blessing in the lives of others, as is manifested in the many ways we serve our community here at home and around the nation and the world.

Grace Church participates in several food ministries: For the Grace Church Food Pantry, parish volunteer distribute donated food staples to needy families and individuals three days each week. For the Brown Bag Lunch Program, every six to eight weeks, in coordination with other area churches, parish volunteers prepare sandwiches and pack lunches for people who are homeless and jobless. For the Carpenter's Shelter, the Lay Eucharistic Ministers and Grace School Parent's Association rotate monthly to prepare and serve hot meals. The Grace Church Outreach Committee also supports this program with an annual financial grant. Grace Church participates in the Meals-on-Wheels program in Alexandria, where drivers and runners deliver about 60 meals on the first Friday of each month.

Grace Church also supports many area Housing Ministries including: ALIVE, which provides food, furniture, child development services, and emergency assistance to needy families and individuals in the community; providing financial assistance to the Carpenter's Shelter, which provides free services to the homeless through a daytime drop-in shelter, a temporary residential shelter, an overnight hypothermia shelter during the cold weather months, an aftercare program for shelter graduates, and transitional housing assistance; Community Lodgings, Inc. – a program that provides affordable housing and counseling for homeless and low-income individuals, where volunteer tutors and mentors provide training in computer skills and job-betterment, as well as

after-school help for at-risk children, and for whom the Grace Church Outreach Committee supports their annual school-supply drive and provides an annual financial grant; and the Winter Overflow Shelter at the Church of St. Clements where parishioners from Grace and other area churches provide volunteers to staff the shelter from January to March each year.

The Grace Church Outreach Committee and the Twenties and Thirties Group work together each year to collect and distribute Thanksgiving food baskets for families in our community, and at Christmas, collect gift cards for distribution by our clergy to families within the Grace community.

At Grace Church, our blessings to others through the generous donations of our time and talents, goes far beyond the city limits of Alexandria.

The Grace Church Outreach Committee and individual parishioners provide financial support to the Haiti Micha Project – a Christian organization committed to addressing the needs of over 500 impoverished and uneducated children in Haiti and provides life-saving needs of a daily meal, clean water, healthcare, clothing, educational assistance, and vocational training for children and young adults living in Mirebalais, Haiti that will prepare them for responsible lives in their community after graduating from high school.

Grace Church and its parishioners also support Episcopal Relief and Development – which is devoted to saving lives and strengthening communities around the world, and the United Thank Offering (UTO) – a ministry of The Episcopal Church for the mission of the whole church, where individuals are invited to embrace and deepen a personal daily spiritual discipline of gratitude, encouraged to notice the good things that happen each day and give thanks to God for those blessings, and make an offering for each blessing. UTO receives these offerings and uses them to support innovative mission and ministry throughout The Episcopal Church and Provinces of the Anglican Communion.

Grace Church also sponsors Mission Trips to American and international locations, where most recently church youth and adult supervisors have visited communities to help repair damage to homes caused by severe weather events.

If you are not already a part of one of these ministries and are interested in being a blessing to people in need here at home and abroad, I am sure that your participation would be welcomed. I encourage you to visit our Web site to learn more about these ministries and reach out to the ministry program leaders to see how you might participate.

I also know that many of us here at Grace Church give to and serve others in our community and elsewhere abundantly in countless ways, and in doing so, are blessed by God to be a blessing in the lives of others, and are blessed to be a part of building the kingdom of God.

Remember the words of Matthew 25:40, “And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” So, everyday – by a simple smile, a kind word, a selfless act, or a thoughtful prayer – I exhort us all to be blessed by God as a blessing in the lives of others, and in doing so – be blessed to be a part of building the kingdom of God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.