

Telling Stories of Generosity
Acts 4:32-37
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
October 11, 2026
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It was the second night of Vacation Bible School. The church was teeming with children. Food was served. Activities were engaged. Songs were sung. Bible stories were told. Everything was going well.

Until it wasn't.

Suddenly, unbeknownst to many at Bible School, one volunteer, muttering under her breath stormed out of the church slamming the door behind her. While I don't know exactly what happened, what I do know is that there was a conflict between a middle aged woman who had long been in the church and who was just that kind of person who showed up for everything and got things done, and a lovely woman a generation younger who was volunteering at Bible School for the first time.

From the bits I heard and the assumptions I made, I suspect that the younger, newer church member felt bulldozed by the more experienced member. From how I know both of them, I also suspect that no malicious intent was involved. But, I also remember that feeling I had, as a young pastor, of worrying that this fracture wouldn't be healed and that something big had broken that night.

So, you can imagine my relief and delight when I walked in for the next night of Vacation Bible School to see those very same two women working next to each other, talking and laughing together. And in that moment, I remembered who that congregation was at its heart...they were a people of generosity.

But what does that mean? What does it mean when we claim generosity?

I want you to stop and take a moment and ask yourself, who are among the most generous people you know? (Pause)

Now, with those people in mind, think about this question - what causes you to call them generous? (Pause)

Sometimes, we connect the word generous to finances. We talk about people who give large gifts to important causes. We talk about people who support a variety of deserving organizations. We talk about people who are willing to fund new ideas or to share what they have with someone who has less.

And, in our scripture today, we certainly hear about financial generosity. Both the particular generosity of one they called Barnabas, and more broadly about people

across the community selling things they owned, holding all that they had in common, in order that everyone was taken care of.

Financial generosity mattered in the early church as they were working to create something different - a community where all people were well and whole, and where worldly distinctions didn't divide them.

Financial generosity matters for the church today as we strive to do the work of God in this world without streams of revenue beyond donors and, in our case, some cost sharing from our arrangement with the daycare.

Financial generosity matters to people in our community and world who are living without...without housing, without healthcare, with food, without safety, without enough.

Meanwhile, financial generosity is only one part of the generosity to which we are called.

Because generosity involves our pocketbooks but it doesn't *just* involve our pocketbooks. Generosity at its best is a characteristic of our hearts and minds.

Generosity is experienced by the young parent whose neighbor lends a hand in a particularly exasperating moment.

Generosity is experienced by the child whose teacher takes time to listen to his story and offer understanding.

Generosity is experienced when a cold cup of water is offered to someone who seems lost or confused.

Generosity is experienced when a smile is offered instead of a frown, when one person takes notice of another and welcomes them in, when people are listened to and believed.

Generosity is experienced when all are not only welcome but wanted, when people are celebrated not for who we might shape them into, but for who they are.

And, if we turn a couple of chapters back in the book of Acts, we hear more about the type of community the early church was building. Similar to what we hear in chapter 4, Acts 2 says, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45, NRSV). Acts 2 also says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42, NRSV) and "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47a, NRSV).

So what we hear is that while they *were* financially generous, while they were willing to share what they had legal right to, they didn't do this in a vacuum. Rather, it was because they created communities of generosity of love, generosity of inclusion, generosity of care...it was because they created communities where people were valued and known, where people were seen and heard, where relationships mattered and values were chosen with intention. While we hear about the financial generosity of those in the early church, it cannot be separated from these other kinds of generosity.

Because when we are willing to invest in getting to know someone, in hearing their story, in learning about their circumstance, then we find that generosity - whether that is of acceptance or support, of sharing money or time - generosity comes more easily.

When we focus on "we" and not just "me" then generosity comes more easily.

When we build communities with intention then generosity comes more easily.

When we choose generosity and make it a habit, then generosity leads to more generosity and we find that it comes more easily.

See often when we, modern people, read passages like these from the book of Acts, we respond from a defensive mode. We talk about the impracticality of selling everything we own because then we are dependent on others. We wonder about who will take care of us if we use all our resources taking care of others. We look at the history of communities like that of the Shakers or even, more locally, the Amana colonies, and we note that their communal lifestyle didn't stay that way forever.

But rather than letting our defenses take over, what if we read this passage as descriptive not prescriptive? What if instead of listing all the reasons we can't look like the early church, we wondered what we can learn from them.

What if we read about the early church and then asked how we can nurture our community - our faith community here at First Christian and our communities beyond that - to be more loving, more egalitarian, more compassionate, and more just?

What if we read about the early church and then asked how we can create communities of generosity...a generosity that moves us to be more open to those who are different from us, a generosity that causes us to be quick to forgive mistakes, a generosity that allows us to be self-aware enough to change our behaviors when they are harming others, a generosity that values people over product, production, and pocketbook?

That it seems is the calling of the early church. And our calling as well.

And, gratefully, here at First Christian Church, we have many examples of generosity to call on.

Where at First Christian have we born witness to God's call to be generous?

- Generosity was witnessed when George and Beatrice Petsel offered a gift of \$10,000 as seed money for low-income elderly housing and from that gift Ecumenical Towers was born.
- Generosity was witnessed when Bob Welsh and this congregation were willing to listen to the voice of a stranger who said, “God told me to come talk to you” and the first winter coat distribution resulted.
- Generosity was witnessed in the early 2000’s when the need for winter shelter for unhoused people became evident and First Christian was the first congregation to approve the use of our building, and then for about a half dozen winters, continued to open our doors to those who needed a warm place to sleep.
- Generosity was witnessed in people like Sally Smith who not only created a safe place for young people to explore their faith and embrace justice, but who throughout her life created spaces for gathering and community building, and then who, in her death, continued to support the mission of this congregation with an ongoing gift through her estate.
- Generosity is witnessed every time that it is made clear that the claim that all are welcome at the table really means everyone, even people others leave out.
- Generosity is being lived out this month as winter coats and diapers and casseroles are shared and dressers are built all because we believe that our neighbors matter.
- Generosity is witnessed every time a new person is welcomed and valued.

Friends, your generosity is abundant...*and*, we are called to be a people growing ever more and more generous. May it be so.