

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Read Acts 20:17-21. Paul is giving somewhat of a farewell speech to the church in Ephesus. He is on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. He has a hunch he will not see his friends in Ephesus again. In these verses, he lifts himself up as an example of determination in the spirit of Christ. Despite obstacles and setbacks he continued to preach the gospel. We need examples of people living out the faith. Without living and breathing examples of what it means to be a Christian in this world, we would all be lost. Who has set an example for you? Are you setting an example for others?

Tuesday – Read Acts 20:22-24. In verse 23 Paul reminds us, through his example, that life is a total loss unless it is used for the purposes of God. We must give to live. We get eternal credit for what we give not for what we keep. Paul also speaks of his single-mindedness (also read Philippians 3:7-13). Paul's strength was his focus. He had one goal in life and he would allow nothing to distract him. His one goal was to preach the gospel. Do you bring the same kind of focus to what God has called you to do?

Wednesday – Read Acts 20:25-31. Paul reminds the leaders at Ephesus to take care of the church because Christ died for it. This is an important reminder for all of us. The church of Jesus Christ, of which we are a part, is a gift from God. And the church is God's best hope for the world. When God does anything significant in this world He does it through His church. We have an obligation to take care of the church and be good stewards of her many gifts. How are you supporting the body of Christ?

Thursday – Read Acts 20:32-35. Paul encourages his friends to stay connected to God's Word for it leads to true blessings from God. He quotes Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." These words are not recorded in the gospels, but most scholars believe they were passed on orally in the early church. It is a simple lesson, but one which takes many a whole lifetime to learn. We were designed by a generous God to be generous. Giving is where real life is found. Just taking shrinks life. Giving expands it. Do you give more than you take?

Friday – Acts 20:36-38. These verses give us a beautiful picture of the holy and loving fellowship found in the church. Paul had developed a deep bond with the church at Ephesus and they were sad to see him go. They had grown in Christian love together sharing life's most significant moments. Where else can we find such love, accountability, strength and support other than the church? If this has not been your experience of the church, how much of yourself have you given to the church? You get out of the church what you are willing to invest.



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Pasadena Community Church

Extravagant Generosity, *Giving from the Heart*

Sunday, October 16, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Act 20: 17-38

On August 28th, 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr. led the march on Washington and delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. It was a defining moment in our nation's history. 250,000 people gathered in Washington that day. Keep in mind that no invitations were given out and there was no web-site to check the date and time of the event. And, of course, no one had a smart phone in their pocket! Yet, 250,000 people showed up on the right day at the right time to make history.

How did that happen? How did King do it? He wasn't the only civil rights leader at the time. He wasn't the only great preacher at the time, either. How did he do it? A better question is *why*?

Simon Sinek reminds us that King had a gift for sharing what he believed and *why* he believed it. He knew if enough people understood *why* he was doing what he was doing they would join him in his cause. King was right. 250,000 people did not show up for King; they showed up for themselves because they believed what King believed. In fact, about 25 percent of the audience was white.

Sinek reminds us that MLK gave his "I have a dream" speech not his "I have a plan" speech! He didn't share the "what" or the "how" of his movement; he shared the *why*. Sinek says all great leaders who inspire action know they must start with *why* before people will be motivated to act on what they believe. *Why* is a question of the heart. When people know *why* and believe in *why* they will do anything for *why*.

I have come to the place in my ministry where I have learned this lesson. People don't commit to anything until they know why they should commit. What people do reflects what they believe. I have learned that people don't commit to what you do; they commit to *why* you do it.

So often pastors are slow to learn this, especially during stewardship campaigns. I must admit that early in my ministry I was slow to learn it, too.

During stewardship campaigns I often made the mistake of delivering "We have a plan" sermons instead of "We have a dream" sermons. I would talk about what money we needed and how we were going to use it. I wondered why people were falling asleep. Eventually it dawned on me that people don't give to plans; they give to dreams. People give because they believe in what the church is doing and why it is doing it! When people know what and how, they give out of obligation. When people know *why*, they give from the heart.

This is why we this year's stewardship campaign is called "Extravagant Generosity – Giving From the Heart." When people know *why* they should give they give generously and extravagantly – they give from the heart. Watch out! When you discover why, your generosity may even surprise you!

So I am going to make it very clear and simple this morning. Why should you fill out a pledge card and give to the church? **Because the Church is God's best hope for the world!**

Paul made it clear in our text for today that Christ died for the church, so we should be shepherds of the church and take care of the church. We should never neglect it. God created the church to be His vessel in the world.

A close reading of history shows that when God does anything significant in this world, it is not done through politics, talk radio, fads, or through secular institutions; it is done through the church!

I know what some people are thinking. "What about all the bad things the church has done

over the years?” Maybe you have a neighbor or relative that comes over to your house every holiday and criticizes the church. Perhaps they bring up the same litany every year – the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, the corruption and abuse of clergy, etc. Maybe some of them tell you they used to go to church but they got their finger caught in the machinery of the church and have never been back. Someone got mad at them or they got mad at someone and, to their surprise, they discovered that the church is made up of imperfect people!

Allow me to let the cat out of the bag for you this morning. The church is made up of imperfect people because, as the old saying goes, the church “is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” There is no such thing as the perfect church. I often find people who are searching for the perfect church. My response is always the same: “There is no such thing as the perfect church. But if you find the perfect church and join it, it will not be perfect anymore!”

The church is not perfect because it is made up of human beings. However, the church is still the greatest thing God has going for Him in this world and if God is going to do something profound in this world He will do it through His church.

I love the church. I love the Church universal and the church local. This is why I give generously to the church. I love walking into the sanctuary on Sunday mornings and seeing the joy on people’s faces. I love listening to the choir and praise band sing. I love watching the ushers and greeters greet visitors with warmth and friendliness. I love walking around this church property at night looking at our cross shine its light in the darkness. It reminds me we are a beacon in this community. Are we perfect? No. But we know the one who is perfect and we know that He can be trusted. We point the way to Him.

I love the church. This is why when people talk bad about the church, I take it personally. I feel like they are criticizing my own family. Don’t mess with my family! Everything I am I owe to God and His church. The church raised me through the nursery and Sunday school. The church nurtured me as a teenager. The church supported me and encouraged me when God called me to preach. The church supported me financially through college, seminary and through my doctoral work. I stand here before you today because of the church and because people were willing to give generously to the church.

You see, the gospel is not something that just

floats around on its own. It is rooted, sustained, supported and organized by the church through the power of Holy Spirit. It is easy to get people saved, but the church keeps people saved. Don’t let that mess up your theology. What I am saying is that there is no such thing as an isolated Christian.

I don’t know any Christian who is growing and serving effectively who is not active in a local church. Sometimes I come across people who think they can grow as a Christian without being part of a church. They claim to love Jesus, but they say they don’t need to be active in a church. This is biblically impossible! Once you receive Christ as Savior you are grafted into the body of Christ. Paul addresses this issue in 1st Corinthians 12 when he tells us the church is like a body and the ear never says to the foot that it has no need for it. No, we all play a key role in the body of Christ and we need each other. Together, by the power of God, we achieve more for God. This is why the church is God’s best hope for the world!

Bill Self reminds us that the church was in the inner cities long before the activists were. The church was into education before the government. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were originally started for the purpose of educating clergy. “The church has been feeding the hungry and creating community while general culture was debating political agendas and power. It was the church that broke down the Berlin Wall, led the March on Selma, produced Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement, and it was the church that led the War on Poverty” (Bill Self, “Surviving the Stained Glass Jungle,” p.79).

The church has been able to move mountains despite opposition, attacks, and the work of evil. Paul tells us in our text for today that savage wolves will try to come in and destroy the church. But all these attacks will never overcome the church because God created the church and His power works through us. Remember Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

The church is infinitely stronger than most people understand. Self reminds us again that “the church has survived Roman Imperialism...pagan optimism, medieval institutionalism...wars and rumors of wars. The church has survived modern skepticism, Southern provincialism, fundamentalism, post-modernism, and heresies in every generation...the church has survived incompetent clergy, tone deaf musicians, manipulative members, argumentative leaders, demanding denominations,

unloving reformers, and greedy politicians” (“Surviving the Stained Glass Jungle,” p.80). It can withstand anything the world throws at it because it is sustained and empowered by God! Still, the church thrives and provides love, affirmation and community to the left out, down and out, thrown out and the bruised, broken, and beaten. It changes lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ!

I must confess a sin to you. When I get around the community and hear people talk about the great things our church is doing I am guilty of the sin of pride. I am so proud of this church. I think God makes allowances for that kind of pride.

Our church is changing lives with the gospel! Whenever I see hungry people take food home from our food pantry, I want to shout, “This is why we give!”

When I meet a waitress who tells me she learned to speak English at our church and it has made such a difference to her life, I want to shout, “This is why we give!”

When I speak with couples who tell me that their marriage was saved by the ministries of our church, I want to shout, “This is why we give!”

When I see people come down this aisle to receive Christ as Lord and Savior, I want to shout, “This is why we give!”

When I see a young child at Gulfport Elementary light up when they see one of our mentors, I want to shout, “This is why we give!”

When I see our children singing about the love of Jesus in their hearts, I want to shout, “This is why we give!”

To critics of the church I ask, “What other institution in the world can change lives like the church can? What other body of people can make a difference for eternity like the church can?”

Why do we give? Because the church is God’s best hope for the world!

There is a touching scene at the end of our text for today. I don’t know if you caught it. Paul has finished his farewell speech to the leaders of the Ephesian church. He knows they will never see him again, and they know it too. They are crying as they walk him to his ship bound for Jerusalem. They know in their hearts that this will be the last time they see each other. One of the last things Paul said to them was, “I commend you to God, and to His message of grace...” What was Paul doing? He was handing the baton to the next generation.

The church is not about you or about me. The church is not about your agenda or my agenda. It is about the communication of the gospel to the next generation. It is about the people who aren’t yet here who need Jesus. The church is about the little children who run around here who one day will have families of their own.

I saw tomorrow in our children today. Maybe one of these kids will discover the cure to cancer. Maybe one of these kids will be a preacher or missionary. Maybe one of these kids will be the President of the United States. Who knows? But one thing we do know is that they will need the church!

Why do we give? Because the church is God’s best hope for the world!

There is an old legend told about Zacchaeus. You remember Zacchaeus. He was short so he climbed a tree to see Jesus in a crowd. Jesus told him to get down from the tree because he was coming over to his house. Jesus transformed his heart and he was never the same again.

The legend goes that after his conversion it was Zacchaeus’ habit to rise early and leave home for a while with a rake and shovel. Mrs. Zacchaeus noticed this one day and asked, “Where are you going?” Zacchaeus replied, “Do you remember that old sycamore tree I was in when Jesus found me? Well, I’m going to take care of it. It has been neglected by the city fathers and needs my care. You see, it held me so Jesus could find me” (Self, p.79).

I know that for many of you the church has been the tree that held you so Jesus could find you and love you. The church was there for you because people were willing to give generously. Now, it is our turn. Why should we give? Because the church holds people so Jesus can find them. The church loves people so Jesus can save them. The church cares for people so Jesus can empower them. The church supports people so Jesus can call them.

When you fill out your pledge card, remember WHY: the church is God’s best hope for the world! So give extravagantly and generously – give from the heart. Amen