

**The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 5-6, 2013**  
**Luke 17:1-10**

***“Living Generously: Increase our Faith!”***

It has been said that God has a marvelous sense of humor; much more so than many of his followers. There's probably truth in that – much more truth than we may care to admit. God's sense of humor often comes into our lives just when we think we've got it all figured out, and we've got all the boards nailed down to the floor, so to speak. It is precisely then that God makes clear we are not in control. Our response in situations like this usually comes down to two things: we either laugh or we cry. I thought of this last week with the temporary shutdown of the federal government, something which directly impacts many of you as employees of the federal government. This, of course, is no laughing matter. It is upsetting and troubling on so many levels, affecting thousands and thousands of people – not just federal workers, but countless others from support industries that undergird the federal government to folks who have had their travel plans disrupted to see national monuments and parks. And in the midst of all this, we begin this weekend a 3-part series on Christian stewardship entitled, “Living Generously.” How's that for irony? And yet, all irony aside, there may well be a greater truth here that the Lord would have us learn. Part of this truth is that God does indeed call us to live generously, even in times of uncertainty and insecurity. God calls us to live generously in response to his great generosity shown to us. And so as we begin this stewardship series that is ironically entitled, “Living Generously,” we start off with that same request that the apostles made of Jesus in today's Gospel lesson: **“Increase our faith!”** (Luke 17:5). That is the theme for the message today. May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and everything that awaits him there: rejection, betrayal, suffering and death. This is why Jesus came into the world: to live that life of incredible generosity, perfect obedience and submission to the Father's will, and to generously pour out his life blood on the cross to purchase our salvation. Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel lesson take place on the road to Jerusalem, and this is set in a larger context of parables and sayings (Luke 14-18). Today we hear how Jesus teaches about temptations to sin, and how we are called to forgive our brother or sister who sins against us and then repents – even if this happens repeatedly. Jesus also teaches how we are to respond for doing what our Master has commanded us to do. Many years ago, a very wise woman said to me, “If you're doing something in order to be thanked, you're doing it for the wrong reason.” I've always remembered this bit of wisdom, and know her words were (and are) spot-on. In our lives as Christ's followers today, He teaches us something similar. “Don't expect to be thanked for doing what I commanded you to do,” Jesus teaches us. Instead, say this: **“We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty”** (Luke 17:10). This probably rubs us the wrong way. We *like* to be thanked. We *want* to be thanked. And when we're not, we start to get resentful, sort of like that older son in Jesus' parable of the Lost Sons, who angrily spoke to his father after his younger prodigal brother returned home: **“Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends”** (Luke 15:29). It's hard to live generously when we're carrying around that resentment in our heart. It's then that we need to pray: Increase our faith!

Who are those people in your life who have modeled for you what living generously looks like? This isn't just about money; it goes out much farther than that. Living generously encompasses things like how we use our time; how we employ our God-given talents and abilities, how we seek to serve in Jesus' Name; how we care for our health in body, mind and spirit; how we look to the needs of others. All of this is stewardship. In today's Epistle lesson (2 Timothy 1:1-14), Paul writes to the young pastor, Timothy, about such people in his life: **“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this**

**reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:5-7).** Living generously is concerned with leaving that legacy of a living faith in God our Maker and Redeemer, passing this gift on to the next generation, just as Lois did for her daughter, Eunice, and as Eunice did for her son, Timothy. I invite you to reflect on who these individuals have been for you, and then give thanks to God for their life and witness. Having received, the Lord now calls us to give in return. And so I also invite you to reflect on how you are being called today to model living generously in word and deed so that others are directed to the Lord Jesus. All this happens through God **“who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10).** And so we pray: Lord, increase our faith!

Living generously is Christian stewardship, which is “the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God’s family, the church, in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes.” Within our congregation’s 4-part vision of GATHER-DISCIPLE-MANAGE-INVITE, is MANAGE. This means that “we see our time, our possessions, and our selves not as things we own, but as that which belongs to God. Our calling is to help each believer grow in a life-style and world-view that are Christ-like, honoring the Lord with our whole life. We joyfully return to God everything He has put into our hands – all that we are and have. We strive to help one another discover our unique and God-given talents, using these in ways that will be a blessing to people inside and outside our congregation.” This is living generously in Jesus’ Name.

The Lord will see us through this time of uncertainty in the midst of the federal government shutdown. Of that we can be sure. He calls us to put our trust and confidence in him, even as He calls us to live generously. If this was easy, it wouldn’t be faith. And so we pray: “Lord, increase our faith.” May God make it so for Jesus’ sake. Amen.