



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, September 18, 2011

In a competition between the Grumblers versus the Generous – I wonder who would come out victorious? Which team would you root for? Which team would you be on? I know which one I would like to be on, but with honesty, I fear I could find myself on the grumbler team. It just comes over me. And after all - look what grumbling got the Israelites – they received free manna and quails. Of course, they ended up grumbling about that also. That's the thing about grumbling – once you get started, it's easy to keep going. And sometimes I think that if I can get everything going My Way, then I'll be satisfied – that I'll lay back and feel good about my place in the world. I'll have figured out enough to be contributing just right and everything will be in balance. Then, of course, I won't have to grumble. I can manage to justify grumbling – how about you? I would have listened to the grumbling vineyard workers, might have joined them. Depends how much it affected my own life.

There's probably good reasons that the 10th commandment states that we must not covet anything that belongs to our neighbor – including how much is in their paycheck. Ah, but we do, don't we? I think envy gets the best of most of us at some time or other. Envy, leading to grumbling, leading to evaluating others and myself all of time, leading to dissatisfaction, leading to.....

And then I am caught off guard and thankful when someone surprises me with a generous spirit. Someone offers me a gift, or says they will teach Sunday School, or trim the trees, or provide music, or lead Youth Group, or sponsor a child's education.....I could go on. The generous spirit is one that I so appreciate. The generous spirit is a reflection of God's abundant grace.

Which is after all what the parable is about today. "Or are you envious because I am generous?" We dare to grumble about God's radical abundance, God's unpredictable, mysterious glory in the world. God's spirit there to shock us, knock all of us off our feet – to leave us blinking wildly – wondering how could this be? God's passionate love pours into our midst right now – proclaiming – you are loved, you are loved. It doesn't matter if you've come to church for years, it doesn't matter if you've walked in the doors today hesitant and uncertain. There is no ranking system of our worthiness – we are all loved, hugely, immensely, beyond our knowing, beyond our ability to figure it out.

And really, how can one live like that? Do we want to? How might you and I cultivate a generous spirit in our own hearts, in our own lives? For it is in our day to day living that generous hearts are expressed.

I recently read a bit about Kathy LeMay's life. She wrote it in the book, "The Generosity Plan." Kathy grew up in New England, starting in Connecticut with her mom, dad, and two sisters. Then there was a divorce and the ladies moved to Massachusetts. Her mom remarried, but her stepfather ended up disabled from back injuries. Her biological father died. She says that throughout her childhood finances were either OK, hard to come by, or downright scarce. Never were they abundant. And though there seemed to be whispers about those who received state aid, she was never ashamed of her family because she thought they were wonderful and interesting people. They told stories, they were advocates and activists for others, they wrote letters, they stuffed envelopes, they were involved in their community.

But as she got older she read about people who made large gifts to hospitals, museums, libraries. They seemed to have fortunes and she envied them. She longed to do more and deeply believed that in order to make bigger and better things happen, you had to have money and lots of it. Philanthropists were larger than life. They moved and shook the world. They manufactured stuff. They erected new wings on hospitals, and started day care centers. People gave speeches about them. They spoke about themselves as fortunate and felt that they should share, give back.

Kathy wanted to be like that. She wanted that kind of money to give away. But clearly she lacked money and seem to lack to kind of jobs that would make her a noted philanthropist. But one day she realized that if starting today, the one thousand wealthiest people in the world gave away all of their money, they still couldn't create a world that is just. That job will only get done when each of us fived of ourselves in the best and most powerful way that we can. It was from that moment that she understood that philanthropy is caring, compassionate people doing what they can, with what they have, where they are. She came up with a generosity plan to guide her life. She decided that she could help make the world a better place by harnessing her passions and contributing her time, talent, and financial resources. She found her life filled with contentment and fun and energy and compassion. She found that generosity is quite simply the habit of giving.

(So, today we share in a baptism. Baptism is about giving. Billy and Colleen have decided to share their baby Frankie Grace with us. They are asking us to be a community of caring that is generous in sharing our gifts and talents with their daughter. And they will share their lives as parents and their child with her special personality with us. The Baptismal Covenant pledges us all to a life of giving.)

Think of giving when we come up to the communion table and the bread and wine are placed in our hands- it's equal amounts of Christ's body and blood for all of us. And it doesn't matter if you come up to the communion rail first or last – we are all fully fed. There is enough, there is enough for all of us. In fact, there is always more than enough. There is always more that can be shared. We can't run out of Christ's presence, of his body and blood. There is always more to be taken out into the world.

So, I invite myself and I invite you to live into an abundant vision of generosity. Let the amazing possibilities of a life with Christ flow through your spirit. The generous abundance of God can't be contained or figured out or kept in some sort of balance. In fact it is futile and embarrassing

to try and keep this miraculous spirit bound up and in balance. It's damaging for me to try doling out mercy and forgiveness and grace in little bits and pieces. Instead, we / I can practice living aware of abundance – more than enough for all. And we can nurture a generous heart – not hoarding, not evaluating, not figuring things out according to our plan, but living generously. Realizing that grumbling and tallying and checking off our lists won't make us or anyone else good – but God's extravagant love will.

I'm rooting for the generous spirited to be victorious. In fact, I think I will try out for their team. Thanks be to God.