

“The Heart of Giving”
Stewardship Series
November 8, 2020
Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Prayer - May your holy spirit speak to us once more and may our hearts listen. Amen

Message

Remember back in the day, before Covid, when we could travel more freely and easily? Anyone else miss that?! One of the first things you learn when traveling, particularly outside the United States, is that you become either a tourist or a pilgrim. Which one it is, makes the difference in your experience and how you live your life after your travels.

A tourist packs not only their camera and binoculars but also a good supply of assumptions, expectations, and preconceived conclusions. Take for example those tram rides or lifts that carry you to the top of the mountain: a tourist climbs aboard already knowing / assuming what they want to see; brochure and camera in hand. They get to the top, snap a few photos and selfies, admire the incredible view and then hop back on and rides back down. At which point they purchase a souvenir to remember it all.

A pilgrim gathers in the same area but rather than board the tram, they slip into their day pack, tighten the straps and start hiking - taking it all in: the steep incline, rocky terrain, possible storms, the heat, discomfort, the unknown. They are committed to the experience and invested in the journey. They reach the top, tired and sweaty, make their way to the lookout area and sit down - absorbing the anticipated view. They might take a photo but even without it, the scene is etched in their mind and heart. After some water and a snack to refuel, they tighten up the laces on

their boots, sling the pack back on, and make their way back down, not needing a souvenir to remember what they just experienced.

Who got more out of the trip? Who invested more in the process? Who came closer to knowing the value of where they were, what they saw, who they met along the way, and how they were changed?

I have nothing against tourists, I have been one and I am sure I will be again. But when it comes to our faith walk - our journey with God and our pursuit of living a Christ like life, I pray we all strive to be a pilgrim in how we live, serve, and love.

A few years ago, I saw first hand this metaphor of tourist or pilgrim unfold. It was while in Guatemala serving alongside a small village near Panajachel. Our group was mostly church folks but we did have a couple college students join us as it was during their "J term." (January) They were looking to fill a few college credit requirements.

One of those students was Josh. Josh was on the Franklin College football team and to my five foot barely four inch frame, he was an absolute massive presence. It didn't take long however, to learn that Josh may have been a tough lineman on the field, but off the field, he was a gentle giant who loved philosophy and music.

One afternoon we were in a small village celebrating the opening of a new school. A school mind you, that we did not build or work on, but because we represented the partnership of Mission Guatemala, the village, and those who did assist in building the school, we were asked to join the celebration. The women and families of the village spent the evening before and all morning the morning of preparing a meal for us. While they finished the preparations on the large open pit fire, we played with the kids and visited as best we could with the language barrier. One of the favorite things the kids liked was to have us pick them up and either swing them around or toss them in the air. You can imagine how fun it was to have six foot ten inch Josh toss these little ones in the air!

We sat down to eat and the women continued to serve us and make sure we had what we needed. Somewhere between sipping on my room temp. bottled water and filling my spoon with a wonderful blend of chicken, rice, vegetables, and broth, I noticed Josh, who was sitting next to me. He wasn't eating and he became very quiet. The next thing I know he was standing up and shaking his head "no." He walked outside and that was when the tears came. He couldn't wrap his head around how a people with so very little could and would provide such a feast for us - complete strangers. He wanted them to take his food and feed their families. He wanted them to eat first. He wanted to give them what money he had in his pocket and the jacket he was wearing. He wanted to put them first. He was overcome by the way they were blessing him out of what looked like nothing.

In that moment Josh was no longer a tourist exploring the sights and sounds, fulfilling college credit requirements, he was a pilgrim expanding and owning the experience. He was no longer looking at his faith through binoculars and selfies, but seeing it in the face of strangers blessing him out of perceived scarcity.

It was a beautiful and heart wrenching scene to watch because I knew how desperately he wanted to make things better, how humbled he was at the generosity of the villagers, and how undeserving he felt of their blessing. I knew he was growing in his faith and understanding of giving, serving, and true community.

I wonder if the same wasn't true for the disciples, the day Jesus watched a widow place what little she had, less than a penny according to some research, in one of the offering plates in the temple, while others with plenty in their pockets gave just enough to show they had extra. They gave with grand gestures, lofty assumptions, and great expectations, and they wanted people to notice. They assumed their significance equaled their contributions and their contributions equaled their significance.

Listen to the words of Mark 12:41-44 and imagine Jesus capturing the moment so that years and years and years later, we might learn, like the disciples, something about the heart of giving.

Read text. Mark 12:41-44 MSG

These four verses speak volumes about how we are to give of what we have and how to live as pilgrims of faith rather than tourists. It is the widow who shows the very heart of giving and it wasn't about the amount she gave - it's never about the amount. It's about the heart. It's about understanding Jesus is more interested in the motivation of our heart than the assumptions in our head.

The Widow's Mites

Two mites, two drops, yet all her house and land,
Fall from a steady [heart](#), though trembling hand :
The other's wanton wealth foams high, and brave ;
The other cast away, she only gave by Richard Crashaw

Jesus wants us to want to give not because we have to or feel guilty or pressured to write that check or support another project, but because when we give sacrificially, it means we understand it is about the relationship, not the deposit slip. It is the relationship with God and others, not the relationship with money and materials. That's how Jesus makes the greatest difference with what we give - in the building, bridging, and sustaining of relationships.

Tourists don't have time for that. Tourists see their faith from a safe distance - they make assumptions and count on their preconceived ideas and conclusions. They take in the view like they would from the top of the mountain or like the sights of a new city. So often, as tourists we give what is comfortable, predictable and measurable, not so much what makes us uncomfortable.

The widow's heart, I believe, was a pilgrim's heart - a heart moving toward Jesus, come way may; taking what the journey brought: struggle, loss, disappointment, as well as love, joy, and peace; trusting Jesus could and would do just as much with her contribution as he would with a larger one.

Commentators tell us that of all that we learn from this woman and her giving, there are three foundational lessons. First, real giving is sacrificial - it costs us something. Real generosity gives until it hurts and I would add, until it makes us uncomfortable, because in the uncomfortable we learn, like Josh did, there is so much more to our growth and experience. In the uncomfortable - when our expectations are transformed is when all we can do is trust God will provide. Whether it is money, time, talent, or the giving of our most vulnerable self, our deepest emotion, our biggest dream, or our smallest desire.

Second, real giving has a certain recklessness in it. The woman might have kept one coin. It would not be much but it would at least be something, yet she gave everything she had. There is a great symbolic truth here. It is our tragedy that there are so often some part of our lives, some part of our activities, some part of ourselves which we do not give Jesus. Somehow there is nearly always something we hold back - "just in case."

Third, it is a strange and lovely thing that the person whom the New Testament and Jesus hand down to history as a pattern of generosity was a person who gave a monetary gift so small, it barely counted as a penny yet has brought huge dividends. The widow is our example of the heart of giving, we just have to put our hiking boots on and trust the journey is worth it.

AMEN