

McCabe United Methodist Church  
“Good Idea – Harder to Live By”  
Galatians 5:22-25  
November 1, 2009  
Rev. Art Scanson.

*Prayer: O Lord, give us an appetite for the fruit of your spirit. We ask today, especially, for a taste of generosity—surprising, spacious, seductive generosity. Amen.*

The scriptures name the Spirit’s fruit – goodness or, perhaps better rendered, “Generosity.” May we find a way to savor that fruit today. A good idea, but harder to live by.

Today can be the day, either literally or figuratively, in which another reality invades, assaults, attacks the material world. The beachhead of this invasion is unmistakable, as real and sacrificial and human and costly—and as victorious—as Normandy.

It was Tom Brokaw that wrote about The Greatest Generation. Tom Hanks starred in *Saving Private Ryan*. But that kind of beach-head, won against frightful gunfire and destructive opposition, is also visible every October or November even in the lowliest church and the poorest parish. It goes simply by the name of **generosity**.

Yes! Generosity is a surprising meddler, a fruit of God’s Spirit, a visitation from another reality. With the enemy fire raining down, generosity marches on in many churches this time of the year.

Into the teeth of selfishness, cultural stinginess, communal exclusiveness, and congregational sanctimoniousness, generosity marches on.

Even into the terror of our rational questioning, generosity comes. Such thoughts as these.

- You can’t give like that now, you’re just getting started.
- You shouldn’t do that, you have little mouths to feed.
- Now it not the time, you are paying a mortgage.
- How can you give with kids in college?
- Better save now, your hair is receding and so is your bank balance.
- Your eyesight is fading and so are your options.
- You’ll need resources as you get older.

Against all of these, generosity moves forward, into the teeth of the gale, and the fierce enemy fire from hidden outposts.

Then we ask, what is the character of the fruit of the Spirit known as generosity? How shall we know its taste in this season of spiritual harvest? Yes, a good idea, but harder to live by.

A clergy colleague tells of his experience in Phoenix. He had the Sunday off - he got up late, skipped breakfast, just made it to worship someone else led, caught a quick lunch as he headed out to see if he could catch a football game. His Giants were in town. Needing a ticket he was watching the crowd, when he saw this large burly man who was not overly tidy in attire, and wearing what had to be at least a size 13 Converse tennis shoes. He was holding up tickets saying, "I have two \$50 tickets that I want to give away. I don't want to sell them. I want to give them away."

No one moved. No one spoke.

"I have free tickets here—two of them. They're on the 30-yard line, 18 rows up. I want to give them away."

So my clergy colleague stepped up took the tickets and said to the man, "Well, I appreciate your generosity—thanks for the tickets. May the best team win as long as it's New York."

Think about this - Do we really appreciate generosity? We don't expect it so we don't see it. It stomps up to us and bites us and we still don't see it. As My colleague friend says: "I was given a place at the table, a seat at the banquet, a ticket to the game—space, entrance, inclusion."

Then came his insight into the nature of the fruit of the Spirit known as generosity:

Generosity surprises us;

Generosity makes space for others, especially for the stranger, the outsider, the other.

Generosity seduces us, at last, into offering our own generous gifts.

**Generosity Surprises Us.** For example, an elderly couple who met at DePauw University in 1926, but never graduated, decided to leave that school their entire life savings—\$128 million dollars. Seventy-five students a year will attend that school with full scholarships. Surprise generosity.

A family needs a place to stay for a summer trip and, hearing the need, a brother in Christ provides a home for the visit. Surprising Generosity.

Yes, it is the nature of the Spirit to take us somewhat by surprise and nourish us generously. So the scriptures teach us.

-“If anyone asks for your coat, give him your cloak as well. If he asks you to go one mile, go a second one too.”

-“Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

-“Let us be generous to all.”

How frightful, daunting, awesome, and profound is our charge in this life to minister to one another so that we are ready to hear such a sentence pronounced: “Well done, thou generous and faithful servant.”

If we can savor generous surprise, then we might also sense that this form of

the Spirit's fruit makes space for others.

**Yes, Generosity Makes Space for Others.** Look at McCabe's ministries as results of the generosity of faithful people of McCabe. These are the people who want the world to be a better place, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who understand that as the seedbed for wonder, morality, and future generosity, the church has a prior claim on our giving.

Here is my push. I know it is appealing to give to many particular causes and special projects in society. But it is another reality, the fruit of the Spirit known as goodness (generosity), which ultimately feeds all giving and to which the church alone bears full witness. I think we so often run the risk of taking our church for granted. McCabe church will prevail into the future only to the degree that we and others choose to reflect divine generosity with some of the human variety.

McCabe's future health will be fed by generosity, goodness that does good. Generosity makes space, in this church, for those who are not yet inside. Why? Why more? Why grow? Because God is generous! And, we believe in God. Because the need of Bismarck/Mandan is great, and we care about that need. The future health of McCabe depends on our becoming, welcoming, inviting, and generous. Yes, we want a healthy and inviting church most of all because we love this church. When our own generosity is quickened, faith is less a dull habit and more a burning passion!

**Generosity Seduces Us.** Sometimes the best gift you can give somebody is the opportunity for him or her to give of themselves. The best gift you can receive is the chance to give yourself away!

So, in that vein, I am going to ask you to give today. This church (McCabe Church) can prosper and not just get by, if you will generously support it. It's entirely up to you. We can't "leave it up to George" as the saying goes. I invite you to give, to pledge strongly, and to tithe. I am aware that this is a very personal decision. Not everyone likes to hear, let alone preach, a stewardship sermon. Yet, token pledges and convenient giving will not keep our church going let alone help heal our world.

If this is to be a giving church, it needs to become a generous church! That is our opportunity today. "Ask not what your church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church."

I know most, if not all of you, have come with your commitment cards already filled out. But if God has been speaking to you today, and I believe God has been. Then with courage, take a step of faith and leave your cards today, but sometime this week call the church office or stop by and get a new set of cards and fill them in with a generous amount. Yes, generosity is a good idea, but harder to live by – But as God's people we can become a generous church!