

Our Hearts Go Out

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

December 2, 2018

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

So for this Stewardship journey we began by witnessing to the generosity of heart of the reviled Samaritan taking a risk and paying for the care of a Jewish man left for dead along the side of the road. We imagined meeting someone on that road waiting for our generosity, our gratitude to overflow in love. In subsequent Sundays we considered that maybe we have a choice on our road of life – a choice to live generously that leads to salvation, perhaps a salvation reflected in this life as much as the next. It is a generosity of mission we live out individually, but also together as we support the mission of St. Andrew's, 135 years young, I believe, and together as we support our larger church's Mission & Service.

Today think about the reference in today's reading to seeds:

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

Imagine yourself as travelling along the road of life sowing the seeds supplied by the Creator. Seeds of giving. Seeds of kindness. Seeds of compassion.

Jesus told the story like this:

"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (Luke 8:5-8)

Scattering seed the way God does it is generous. It isn't meager and sparing. If we see ourselves as the sower in our lives, we are invited to be generous, extravagant. Occasionally the birds come or the sun burns too bright. That's okay because that's what happens when you scatter seeds. Look at what happens, though, when the seed hits the good soil, where your generosity really takes root...there's a crop. One you couldn't predict. One you couldn't even imagine. One that produces "a hundredfold" of what was sown, the scripture says.

In our church life, we couldn't have predicted the amazing results that living our mission has had.

This St. Andrew's Sunday, we celebrate our heritage. A Presbyterian church planted in the pioneer town of Sudbury in 1883 as the national railway was being constructed. Our Creator planted leaders in this congregation, clergy and lay, who have each had vision and faith to help this congregation to realize God's dream in their context. There is a rich heritage of generosity here at St. Andrew's. Leaders like those of the Sharing Resources Team, the Stewardship Team, carefully stewarding our gifts, but also smart people who know when faith needs to shine and God is calling us to take a risk by investing boldly in outreach and mission.

I imagine that period when St. Andrew's United Church decided to go out on a limb and build affordable apartments around a church. When the Spirit speaks, this congregation with faithful leaders has answered the call. WE are the sowers of seeds in 2018 – or maybe we are the seeds, depending on your perspective. Our world that awaits us out there needs seeds of love, badly. The saying "My heart goes out to you" comes from the Corinthians passage we read today from the New International Version. Paul explains the human response of our seed sowing: "And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you."

There is so much good we do in the world from our words and actions that we don't get to see. Here at St. Andrew's, to get specific, you who help move risers, pianos, chairs when Roger calls – you aren't just moving, you are maintaining this sacred space. A space filled with the magic of music in concerts, and we encounter Spirit and God's presence in worship here.

Those of you who have help with Book Studies, and programs for children and youth – you aren't just leading programs, you are cultivating hearts, opening generosity & love in hearts that need to withstand a whole lot of fear and self-centredness in our world today.

And fundraising people – fundraising is just a small part of it. You are creating events that create community. And the finances you help to raise: ensure that vulnerable people get a meal on Friday nights; make sure that ministry happens; that people know for real that we are not alone, God is with us even in the darkest times.

At the end of Paul's appeal in 2 Corinthians he thanks God for God's "incredible gift." The Greek word used for "incredible gift" is found only in this passage. A gift beyond our understanding. Beyond words. The seeds you and I hold in our hands are an incredible gift. A holy gift. An often surprising gift whose impact we can't imagine.

Thank you for your gifts of time, talent and treasure – the seeds you scatter so generously. Thank you for the work you do that people see, but even more for the gifts that don't get a lot of attention. God sees. Your Stewardship Team is deeply grateful for you. Our hearts go out to you. Amen.

Adapted from a sermon by the Rev Trisha Elliott
for the United Church Stewardship Program "Loving Our Neighbours"