

November 22, 2009 Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday
Gen. 1:26-31 *To Live is to Give*
Acts 20:35; Mt. 6:24

Do you remember what it was like? Do you remember when life was such a gift that you simply received it with joy? Do you remember when you were so confident of this gift of life that you knew you were in very good hands, held safely, securely in the arms of God? Do you remember? You trusted God then, you really did—your life was such a calm, confident trust that nothing rattled you; you knew there always was enough for you and everybody else. Do you remember? Try to remember! Or have you forgotten? If you have forgotten, God wants you to try to remember because your life and my life now is so often full of worry, anxiety, and wondering if there will be enough for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren for tomorrow. You gotta try to remember because you don't live your life like that anymore—you don't receive it as a gift but you take it wherever you can get it.

Why are we children of God so overtaken by worry and anxiety for tomorrow? It's an old, old story—one with which we are very familiar though sometimes it's hard to remember. You see, life didn't always used to be like this. This is not the way it was originally created. This is just not the way God made it. Do you remember? God wants you to remember.

In the beginning God gave life. That's the story in the book of Genesis, isn't it? In the beginning God gave life. Life was the first great gift. So the first point to be made today is God gives and we are. We are the result of God's giving. In that gift of life God provided abundant provision. God made a world with plenty for everybody. God made a world of love, justice, and grace. What a marvelous gift this is. And God is so giving, generous, and trusting that God gave to us the ability to create along with God. God invited us to the edge of creation in order for us together to

make a world. But then that snake came along and said, “You will not die (if you eat of the fruit of that forbidden tree); for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.” And so we ate of the fruit that was forbidden us. We chose then to provide for ourselves. We chose to possess, own and control creation and be masters of our own destiny and make a life for ourselves. We were afraid not to—we better keep for ourselves or there won’t be enough, or so we feared. And we have lived out of that fear ever since.

At that moment humanity centered life no longer on God but sought fulfillment among the penultimate and unsatisfying elements of the created order. In this tragic fall of creation, a life of abundance, sharing, and joy became an existence of struggle, worry, anxiety, mistrust, greed, hardship, pain, and injustice. And all that so that we could be like God!

We forgot, and we forget, that *God gives and we are.*

To be like God is not to possess, own, and control

To be like God is to be giving, generous, and trusting

Furthermore we don’t have to make anything of ourselves to be like God for that’s the way we were created—to be giving, generous, and trusting people—people created in the very image of God. That image of God is still in us. It is shoved aside, off-center, but it is still there. We are never really home until we are at home in God. We are never really at peace until we ultimately trust this God and become the giving, generous people we are. That leads us to the second point this morning: *Giving is living*—that’s the way we’re made.

Giving is living. Life is not found in how much we receive, accumulate, or possess. You know, it is not only true that “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” it feels right. It is of the very essence of what it means to be human. The relationships that define and enrich our lives are formed and sustained in how much we give of ourselves to our trusted friends and loving family

members. The fulfillment and joy these relationships give us is pure grace—the abundant fruit of the gift of our life in that relationship that produces for both far beyond that which is ever given to the other.

God gives and we are

Giving is living

From the time of the fall of creation God kept right on giving. Even though we turned our back on God, God, who knows that life is made not by the taking but by the giving, kept right on giving.

God gave a name and a promise to a man named Abram.

God called one named Moses to lead the people out of Egyptian slavery.

God gave a land flowing with milk and honey.

God sent prophets to warn, encourage, and correct.

God returned the people to the land following a period of exile in a foreign country.

God, time and again stepping into the midst of human history delivering, restoring, loving, saving humanity from itself and from our own desperate pursuit of meaning, value, and worth in life everywhere else except in God.

The Christian story in this regard is the most moving of all to us, is it not? God has an only Son and God gives him, too! What more evidence do we need that the very essence of life is in giving than the gift of God's Son for our salvation? Jesus did not come to take, own, possess, and control creation—indeed, it was already his to do with what he wished. No! He gave it all, gave it all even to his own death on the cross. God gives and we are. Giving is living.

And on the third day in the resurrection from the dead is there any doubt at all that a life of giving is forever? God never stops giving and we never stop living. A life of giving is forever.

You want to live no longer in fear, anxiety, and worry? GIVE
You want to touch the very secret of life? GIVE
You want to taste the very essence of eternity? GIVE
Stop living your life thinking you have to possess, own, control,
and somehow make a life for yourself. GIVE
Give your life more fully to God, in love to your family and
friends, in service to others, on behalf of the poor, downtrodden,
and the victims of injustice. GIVE

About this time of year every year your church shares with you a real secret, a real key to unlocking the power of this truth in your life. About this time of year Warwick Memorial Church provides you a wonderful opportunity to focus this truth in one particularly important aspect of your life. It is one that Jesus considered essential if you are ever to take up this spiritual discipline of giving in a truly life-transforming way. There is no greater rival for our allegiance in this culture than money. It vied for human allegiance so strongly in Jesus' day that he called it mammon, meaning wealth or money, an Aramaic word for one of the principalities and powers of this world that rivals God. "You cannot serve two masters: God and wealth." In Jesus' day and in our day it is the way to our heart. Nothing worries us more, motivates us, controls us, or manages our very lives more than money. In our affluent culture if we can ever learn how to handle this one we take a significant step in our own spirituality—a step closer in our relationship to God.

Through the years, as humanity sought to "try out" this life of giving that God created, people of God began to make an offering to God as a systematic, regular and meaningful expression of thanksgiving. The practice eventually developed with the tithe (10%) becoming the minimal customary measure of relational response offered by the community. The people responded generously because they believed they were uniquely gifted by a generous God.

In this regard we become the benefactors of the wisdom of the ages as we center upon the tithe (10%) as a model, a minimal standard or goal for us in our day. The first priority of our financial planning ought to be the prayerful commitment of a specific proportion of our money for God. It is true that an essential first step in our spiritual growth is the very exercise itself of first realizing what we give and then committing a regular, systematic, and consistent financial offering. Set aside a proportion of what God has given you. For some of us the tithe will be a goal we shall grow toward. For others, whose resources are greater, the tithe will be an insufficient spiritual teaching—for generosity and sacrifice will lead them to a higher goal. But pray about it, have family discussions about it, and make a commitment of a gift. For to live is to give.

As you make your pledge today, I trust this will not simply be an exercise for the church's Finance Committee to estimate a church budget for 2010. I trust this will not be an exercise by which you seek to affirm or discourage or otherwise influence the mission and program of Warwick Memorial Church. The focus today is not the need of the Church to receive, but the need of the giver to give. I urge you, I challenge you to make this a significant step in your own spiritual journey

- to grow one step toward the tithe
- to give generously and sacrificially
- to be free of the allegiance to money so prevalent in our culture
- to no longer be overtaken by worry and anxiety about tomorrow
- to live the truth deep in your heart

God gives and we are

Giving is living

A life of giving is forever

To live is to give

William G. Davidson