

10.29.23 – Pentecost 22
“Divine Generosity in Anxious Times”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Proverbs 3:9; 21:20 (TLB)

⁹⁻¹⁰ Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of all your income, and he will fill your barns with wheat and barley and overflow your wine vats with the finest wines.

²⁰ The wise man saves for the future, but the foolish man spends whatever he gets.

Malachi 3:10-12 (TLB)

¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food enough in my Temple; if you do, I will open up the windows of heaven for you and pour out a blessing so great you won't have room enough to take it in!

“Try it! Let me prove it to you!” ¹¹ Your crops will be large, for I will guard them from insects and plagues. Your grapes won't shrivel away before they ripen,” says the Lord Almighty. ¹² “And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land sparkling with happiness. These are the promises of the Lord Almighty.

Leader: These Life Lessons Are from God! All: Thanks be to God!

1 Timothy 6:2c-16 (TLB)

² If their owner is a Christian, that is no excuse for slowing down; rather they should work all the harder because a brother in the faith is being helped by their efforts. Teach these truths, Timothy, and encourage all to obey them.

³ Some may deny these things, but they are the sound, wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and are the foundation for a godly life. ⁴ Anyone who says anything different is both proud and stupid. He is quibbling over the meaning of Christ's words and stirring up arguments ending in jealousy and anger, which only lead to name-calling, accusations, and evil suspicions. ⁵ These arguers—their minds warped by sin—don't know how to tell the truth; to them the Good News is just a means of making money. Keep away from them.

⁶ Do you want to be truly rich? You already are if you are happy and good. ⁷ After all, we didn't bring any money with us when we came into the world, and we can't carry away a single penny when we die. ⁸ So we should be well satisfied without money if we have enough food and clothing. ⁹ But people who long to be rich soon begin to do all kinds of wrong things to get money, things that hurt them and make them evil-minded and finally send them to hell itself. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows.

¹¹ O Timothy, you are God's man. Run from all these evil things, and work instead at what is right and good, learning to trust him and love others and to be patient and gentle. ¹² Fight on for God. Hold tightly to the eternal life that God has given you and that you have confessed with such a ringing confession before many witnesses.

¹³ I command you before God, who gives life to all, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a fearless testimony before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you fulfill all he has told you to do so that no one can find fault with you from now until our Lord Jesus Christ returns. ¹⁵ For in due season Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only Almighty God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone can never die, who lives in light so terrible that no human being can approach him. No mere man has ever seen him nor ever will. Unto him be honor and everlasting power and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Leader: These Words of the Apostle Paul Are from God. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, we thank you for all the ways we've been together in your name this week. Please open our minds and hearts to hear a message to calm our anxiety and remember our commitment to stewarding our resources. Help us to understand what it means to be divinely generous, especially these days. Our hearts are still heavy Lord from the murders in Maine, the violence of the wars, and of course our grief surrounding Berniece. Fill us with your divine comfort to cope with these matters, and new energy to share your love and abundant resources with others. May we hear your Words and your voice as you speak through this servant. Amen.

Good morning, beloveds! Now, when was the last time you were called "beloved"? Although it might have been a while, I wanted to share that greeting with you to set the right tone for a sermon on stewardship. Yes, it is that time of year. Fall is the traditional time to examine stewardship as the last quarter comes to an end, and at a time when many churches address and discuss their annual church budget, as we will at the Annual Membership Meeting following the service. I do hope you'll stay for that.

God calls **you** beloved; Solomon used the term several times as affection between lovers, yet we know it in the New Testament as the love of Christ. Simply put, "beloved" means "dearly loved." The best New Testament illustration comes from the aging disciple, John, who loved Christ deeply and whom Christ loved as a brother. In his epistles alone he addresses his disciples twelve (12) times as "beloved." Paul

terms "God's elect" "holy and beloved" in Colossians 3:12. But that term is not often heard in the same paragraph as stewardship but let me suggest it should and could be used with the word "generosity." As I studied the selected passages and the Scriptures from October, it occurred to me that those people I know with the spiritual fruit and gifts of generosity are divinely motivated. So, if God's divine presence, us being divinely selected, taking divine risks, and receiving divine legacies of faith articulate our faith journey, then "divine generosity" must be a result and perhaps even a goal.

You've heard it said and you can see in our financial statements that we are a blessed congregation by past decision-making, your giving, and because of God's love and vision for you and this church. People you'll never know have been recipients of his love through your generosity. They and you are beloved to our Creator God, and so we are blessed; out of those many blessings, we give to the ministries of this church and to those who need our assistance, because, despite their circumstances, they too are "beloved." They too are anxious right now as inflation soars, benefits are reduced, politics divide, and international wars take place. My sermon title suggests but may not answer the question on my heart, "how do we observe and practice divine generosity in such anxious times?" So that is for you to ponder individually in prayer. The Scriptures affirm that we can and must be divinely generous even in anxious circumstances because **we believe** in an almighty God, who is omnipotent (divinely powerful), omniscient (sees all), loving, and providing (because he sent his Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, John 3:16).

Now, what do today's Scriptures reveal to help us stay calm and carry on? In Israel, honoring the Lord with the first fruits of all one's crops was a way of expressing gratitude to Him for sustenance. In exchange, God promised (according to the wisdom of Proverbs) to fill the barns with grain and the vats with new wine (תִּירוֹשׁ, *tirosh*), which was really freshly squeezed grape juice not yet fermented. A wise person stores up food like an ant preparing for winter. A foolish person cares only for the pleasures and treasures of now, not preparing for a time of lack. He or she will have no food for between the harvests! That is the warning of the proverb. Yes, trust God's provision, but be smart. If you have plenty during the lean times, you may be generous to help others.

Malachi ministered in the 5th Century BC 100 years or so after the Jews had returned to Judah from exile. He was God's messenger (which is what Malachi means) to the people about their lives, the way they worshipped, and especially their sacrifices and offerings. The quality of their sacrifices was in question and Israel was accused of cheating God. The tithe outlined in Leviticus 27:30, 32 was to be one tenth of all produce and livestock and the first of all would be "holy to the Lord." It was to be given to the Levite priests. Through Malachi, the Lord appealed to the people not to cheat God, but to provide these offerings willingly for the priests of God's temple. They were to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, what we would call a special room in the temple to store grain. This would help the people see God's promises fulfilled—healthy crops and unblemished wine.

We know, however, that the New Testament and Christ fulfilled this law, so we must be cautious how to apply those instructions today. God's

love is not conditional as it was for Moses and the Israelites of Exodus. Christ was the sacrifice and paid the price as our full sin offering. Despite that horrific time on the cross, Jesus teaches us the gift of generosity through the resurrection and the testimonies of his disciples and apostles. This understanding affirms God's blessing on those who give in such troubled times.

Paul warns Timothy and us to be careful even though God sustains us. A **desire** for riches opens us up to temptation and sinful methods to obtain wealth at any cost. In the daily news, we see that criminals take what they want. The false teachers of Timothy's day were preaching a conditional, prosperity gospel, much like the Old Testament. If you do this, God will do that for you; Paul warns him to teach instead that wealth is fleeting. We come into this world (thanks to our creator, God) with nothing, and we go out of this world into the next with nothing. Why amass such material goods for selfish motives of pleasurable living, when you or your children will have to dispose of it someday? Godliness with contentment is the greater gain; yes, it is intangible, but frugality builds character and provision for that "rainy day." And Timothy is to teach his church to trust in God, the living God who provides all things, and then to do good with what they do have. Be rich in good works, not material goods! The **love** of money is the root of all evil; it brings temptation, lust, poor decision-making, and more trouble. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus himself warns the disciples not to worry about tomorrow, for it will have troubles of its own: "19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart

will be also.” That’s what Paul means when he says, “Fight the good fight.” Be on guard against moral corruption and pay attention to sound doctrine, especially giving and generosity. Trusting God to be the divine provider and philanthropist is key but remember that we are his instruments of charity and hope. For you, divine generosity might not be money, but your time, your talents, your patience, or your love. Be not anxious! Be strong and courageous, as the Lord told Moses who told Joshua as he entered the promised land:

⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Let us carry on the work of our faith and ministry, being divinely generous in time, talents, and tithes, embracing the legacy of serving others, confident in God’s bounty, strength and direction. Amen! //

Please pray with me. Lord and Savior, we thank you for calling us “beloved.” We have received a rich legacy of faith and resources to do your ministry. Help us to be good stewards of those resources. Help us to share your love with those who need your grace and mercy. May we study more deeply the Scriptures, praying and listening for your direction, encouraging one another in these anxious times. In your beloved Son Jesus’ name, we pray, **Amen.**