

## A Round-trip Ticket to Generosity

[Text-Matthew 9:35-10:8]

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November 12, 2017

In this morning's New Testament Reading. Jesus is on a roll. He's going from city to city, village to village, proclaiming the good news of the Divine Realm. His message and his Presence bring hope and healing to all those he encounters; yet Jesus still has an unsettling concern. The more he travels the region, the more he realizes that one person alone - not even a hard-working *Messiah* - can contain or convey the overflowing abundance of Divine love and grace that is necessary to touch and transform the world. Matthew writes, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the ruler of the harvest to send-out laborers into the harvest'...."

And then it hits him, "Wait a minute, you 12 guys have been following me for quite some time now. Maybe it's time for *you* to get out there and show us what you've got! We'll even ease into it, starting with the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and see where it goes from there." Then Jesus gives his followers - including you and me - a fundamental principle for success: "Freely you have received, freely give." It would seem *natural* that people who have freely received countless Divine blessings, would freely share those blessings with others. Unfortunately, though, there is an aspect of our human *nature* that can block this path to generosity. And that roadblock can be summed-up in one word: *fear*. The *fear* that if we give too much, we ourselves may run short.

Fortunately, though, there is a way to circumvent this fear. And that way can be summed-up in one word: *faith!* The *faith* that the more we give, the more we receive. Which brings us to the theme of this year's Stewardship Drive: "Journey to Generosity". *Journey to Generosity* - it sounds a little like a Hallmark Channel Christmas Special. "He was the

cantankerous town Scrooge; so cheap, that he wouldn't even tip his hat; so stingy that he named himself sole beneficiary in his own will. But then one day, he began the fantastic *Journey to Generosity!*"

The *Journey to Generosity* can also sound like a long and toilsome trek; yet it's actually a rather simple excursion. In fact, this "journey" requires only 3 basic steps! The first step, is that we *recognize* our own blessings. The second, is that we *Realize* the Divine Abundance that surrounds us. And the third, is that we *Rejoice* in sharing those abundant blessings with others.

We have to start with the recognition of our own blessings; because if you and I don't appreciate the fact that we ourselves are blessed, then how could we possibly have anything of value to share with others? And I'm not just referring to our material blessings, or our financial well-being. Some of the richest and most generous people I know have modestly small bank accounts, yet magnificently large hearts. They recognize that their lives are full and rich and meaningful; and they understand that by sharing what they have - and who they are - with those around them, doesn't *diminish* their blessings, but rather *expands* them. And these people aren't afraid of extending themselves too far, because they have come to realize that there is a Divine Abundance that surrounds them.

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see that he, too, is a firm believer in the reality of Divine Abundance. So many of his teachings - and his actions - reflect this belief. Jesus consistently describes the Divine Realm as being like a small seed, with tremendous potential for expansion and growth. And he routinely brings this potential to life, by freely sharing who he is and what he has - and watching it grow, exponentially. He shares his forgiveness and grace, and people's lives are restored. He shares some bread and fish, and huge crowds of people are fed. He shares his compassion and love, and countless individuals are made well and whole. And as those around him also begin to trust in the Divine Abundance, they become active participants in the sharing and the growth. As they *realize* this Divine

Abundance, they help make it *Real* - filling their lives, and the lives of those around them, with tremendous joy!

That's the third step in the *Journey to Generosity* - when we *rejoice* in sharing those abundant blessings with others - when we actually get a kick out of being kind and generous, giving and forgiving, helpful and positive. Some people say, "When you love your job, it's really not work." Similarly, when you and I get to the place where we *recognize* our own blessings, *realize* the Divine Abundance that surrounds us, and *rejoice* in sharing them with others - then we have come full circle.

In our Continuing Testament, Sherry Antonetti writes, "We should remember that we're not only helping others by our generosity, but also ourselves. Because the more we give, the more Christ-like we become." Jesus Christ finds tremendous joy, purpose, and fulfillment in giving all that he has and all that he is for the sake of others. Today, and every day, Jesus invites you and me to join him on that fantastic Journey to Generosity - a journey of just three steps; yet a journey that we can enjoy for an entire lifetime!