

**JOURNEY TO GENEROSITY:
*JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE***

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: John 14:1-6

Happy Mother's Day to everyone! We do celebrate you this day. We also celebrate and give thanks for all the women who have been like mothers to us – whether it be an Aunt or Grandmother or Sister – even a very dear friend or a neighbor or maybe even a woman in the church. Take a moment and think of who that special woman who is in your life that showed you the way to be the person you are today. Who are you giving thanks for today? If you are sitting near someone – turn to them and just share briefly who that person is.

I found a tribute to mothers I'd like to share as we begin today. The author is unknown – but it's written, perhaps, by a child. I have added somewhat to it, to fit our purposes for today. Listen for what legacy – what values and ways of life are shown:

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favorite pie just for me, and I knew that little things are special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me goodnight, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and learned that sometimes things hurt, but that it's alright to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you reach out and help someone in need and learned what it meant to be a disciple.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you put an offering in the plate at church and volunteer your time and learned how to be generous and live as a steward.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked ... and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw - when you thought I wasn't looking.¹

How grateful we are for the mothers – and women in our lives that have shown us the way to live *our* lives.

That all connects us to our passage today from the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John. I encourage you to get out your Bible and turn there – and I will give you just a little background to the story. In the 13th chapter of John, we read how Jesus gathers in the upper room with His disciples for the Passover Meal. There He kneels and washes their feet – showing His love for them. And He says to them: *“I have given you an example to follow – do as I have done to you.”* And then later, He says, *“I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that You are my disciples.”*

And with that, Jesus begins the Upper Room Discourse – Jesus’ last words to His disciples, words to meant to comfort them and prepare them for what is to come.

Let’s read John 14:1-6 –

¹*Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.* ²*There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?* ³*When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.* ⁴*And you know the way to where I am going.”* ⁵*“No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?”* ⁶*Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

These verses are probably recognizable as you have probably heard them read at a funeral or memorial service – which is very appropriate. Jesus was sharing these words, right before He died, with His disciples, who would obviously be grieving His upcoming crucifixion. But the words were also an encouragement for how to live after He was gone – to continue on a path that will lead to God’s house in heaven.

Thomas was confused as he listened to Jesus. He says to Jesus: *“We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”* Jesus responds by saying, *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* By Jesus saying, “I am the way”, Jesus says - I’ve opened up a way to get to heaven – I am your pathway to heaven and salvation. I am also the very path you walk as we journey here on earth, on our way to heaven. Jesus showed us the way to walk that path and live in God’s will - to love and to serve, to give and forgive, to obey and point to God the Father through all our lives. We are called to follow His ways and put our faith into action.

The early Christians, as mentioned several times in the book of Acts, were actually called “followers of the way”, before they were called Christians (which means Christ followers). For example, in Acts 22, Paul shares his testimony of how, before he met Christ, he persecuted the “followers of the Way– hounding some to death, arresting them and throwing them into prison.” As he went down to Damascus to arrest any “followers of the Way” Jesus appeared to Him and asked, “Why are you persecuting me?” That’s when Paul became a follower of the Way himself - and an apostle for the Lord Jesus.

In Acts 2 we discover the way these early Christians lived their lives – following the way of Jesus. Beginning at verse 43:

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Those followers of the Way – the early Christians – were acting as generous stewards of everything God had given them – and their act of stewardship helped people see God.

I read a definition of stewardship this week and unfortunately I don't remember the source – but it reads like this: “Stewardship, quite simply, is recognizing that everything we have and everything we are is a gift from God and being grateful and generous with those gifts. It is taking care of and sharing all of God's gifts. The practice of stewardship is: returning a portion of one's time, talent and treasure back to God in gratitude for the gifts He has given us. Living a Stewardship Way of Life, requires us to put Jesus Christ first in our lives and to live every aspect for the glory of Him. Stewardship is living as Jesus intends...making God's love visible by imitating Jesus.

So how does this calling to be faithful stewards, translate into our daily lives? God, the ultimate owner, has blessed us with gifts – our talents, our time, our resources and even faith itself. The question we have, in living as stewards of those gifts is not, “What do I own?” but “how can I best use what God has given me for His purposes and glory?”

God has given us the gift of time. Imagine your schedule as a precious resource. How can you use some of that time to volunteer at church or some community service – to mentor a young person or reach out to people who are lonely or hurting. How can you spend quality time with loved ones who may be feeling neglected?

God has also given us the gift of talents. Everyone has a talent. Have you discovered yours – and are you using them to point others to Jesus. Are you a musician? Perhaps you can share your talent in our worship services. Are you good with kids – perhaps you can work with the youth of the church. Are you a tech whiz – could you volunteer to help assist others with technology challenges?

God has given us the gift of faith. Are you sharing that faith with others? It doesn't have to be some big, grand gesture. It can be as simple as living a life that reflects Christ's teachings, being a role model for others – or just simply have a conversation about your faith with those around you.

God has also given us the gift of our wealth and resources. And we are called to honor God with our wealth. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, “*Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best*

part of everything you produce. ¹⁰ Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.”” Giving your first fruits means that you acknowledge God’s ownership of all that you have. It means that you are not giving God your left-overs. It means your gift to God is not an afterthought – but your first thought. It means that we are not going to give God our second best – we are going to honor God by giving first to Him. He gave everything to us – in sending us His Son Jesus to die on the cross for us. Our hearts should be so filled with gratitude that we would want to give Him the first fruits of our labors to honor Him.

Henry Crowell gave his life to Christ as a young man. When he began his business career in a little Ohio factory, he promised God that he would honor Him in his giving. God’s blessing was upon him and as his business grew, he increased his giving. Crowell saw all things as a stewardship from God. And everything he did, he sought to honor God. After more than 40 years of giving 70% of his income to God, Crowell - the founder of Quaker oats company - said this: “I’ve never gotten ahead of God. He’s always been ahead of me in giving.”²

Oh, how badly we need a conversion of our wallets and checkbooks. We need a conversion of our hearts that gives God the first place in our lives and honors him with the first fruits of our labors.

In Malachi 3:8-10, God sent a message to the people who were not tithing anymore or giving to help the ministry of the temple. He addresses the people and says, *“you are robbing Me... and holding back your tithes and offerings! Bring the full tithe into the storehouses so that there may be food in my house, this put me to the test see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”*

God is saying again and again to us, *“trust me ... I can do the impossible in your church! Don't underestimate me You're set your sights too low. I'm able to do far more abundantly than you ask for things. Give me your offerings and your tithes and just see if I don't open the doors of heaven and shower blessings upon you. Trust me!”*

My friends I believe when we give God the stewardship of our talents and faith, our time and our resources – God can do amazing things in and through us – to make a difference in the community and world. I do believe that God wants First Christian Church to have a strong and vital ministry in Galesburg. I believe that God is calling us to do something great. We just need to bring our tithes and our offerings and place them in His hands and believe that it is possible.

This week, you will be receiving in the mail our commitment cards for how we will be sharing our gifts for the coming fiscal year. These pledge cards are definitely used to help the church devise a budget (spending plan) ... a way we can make plans for the future ministry of the church. But more than that, these cards are promises to God. Our pledges are external and tangible evidence of our internal love and gratitude and trust for God.

Once, during a Sunday morning worship service, a child wrote some notes. Among them was a brief message to God. The card was placed in the offering plate and was eventually given to the pastor to read. The note read: “Dear God. I love you. Do you love me? Answer, yes!”

This week as you fill out your pledge card, think of it as your love note to God. Take time to pray and reflect on how much God has done for you. Surrender your life and your money to God. As you fill that card out, share with God your love and your commitment to trust him with your whole heart. When God asks you - can you trust me? Answer, "yes I do!" Yes, I will serve you. Yes, I will give - because you gave so much for me."

PRAYER

INVITATION

You are invited to come today to make a decision for the Lord. Come to confess your faith – or to rededicate yourself to following in His ways each and every day. Won't you come now, and we will rejoice with you in your decision! Come now as we stand and sing.

RESOURCES

¹Author Unknown. "*When You Thought I Wasn't Looking*", found on page 171 in *Stories for the Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray. Published by Vision House Publishing, 1996.

²<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/28542/what-those-oats-can-do-by-herman-abrahams>