

Our scripture passages for today, for those listening later online, are
Deuteronomy 15:7-15, Psalm 112, 2 Corinthians 15:1-8, Mark 5:22-43

It has been almost 4 years since I last preached, how much time do you all have?

Seriously though, without going into the details, I haven't felt ready to preach until recently. Pastor Brook told me multiple times to let him know when and if I was ready, and not long ago I finally felt like I could again.

To be honest though, I don't really feel like I have a sermon for you today. Let me explain.

Being raised in the Baptist tradition, and formally pastor-ing a couple Baptist churches, I never had specific Biblical passages assigned to me. So when these two Sundays were offered to me, and the verses were given, I was excited to jump into the passages to see where we'd be going. But I must confess, it didn't take long for the excitement to fade.

I dove into them in order, starting with the Old Testament reading on Deuteronomy, and right away read, ***“But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be***

hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them. ⁸ Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need.”

Hmm, a passage on money... nah, let's see what else we've got.

I looked to the passage in the Psalms and saw, ***“They have given freely to the poor.”*** Another money passage..... I thought, “well, at least I have two more to look at.”

I turned to the Epistle, 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and read, ***“For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will.”***

I may be slow, but I was starting to notice a trend and perhaps you noticed it too. It was clear that Pastor Brook took off today because he didn't want to preach on money! ☺

I doubt that, but to be honest, I didn't want to preach on money. My first thought was on every sermon I ever heard about testing God in giving, or on giving until it hurts. The passage in 2 Corinthians said, ***“they gave not only what they could afford, but far more.”*** I thought about preachers on TV and the image that so many outside the church have, that all the church is interested in is your money.

And after not preaching for so long, this is not the topic I wanted to preach on.

I wrestled with it... I thought, well, at least I get two weeks to preach, I can probably make up for this poor sermon next week. I'm actually not joking, that was really one of the thoughts that went through my head.

But I still had one more passage to look at. The Gospel according to Mark. And here I found one of my favorite stories, the story of Jairus, the synagogue leader who went to Jesus because his daughter was dying and when those around him laughed at him, Jesus said, ***"Don't be afraid. Just trust me."***

As we'd say in my Baptist tradition, "Now here was a passage that would preach."

A story of faith, a story of perseverance, a story of trust, a story of God doing the impossible.

We have this man who, as a ruler in the synagogue, was putting it all on the line to go and ask Jesus for help.

Here is a man that when others told him, "don't waste Jesus's time", he went.

Here is a love so strong and a faith so big that it continued on despite and in the face of the laughter and mocking of others. I think I could preach this one.

But I continued to think of those other passages, that attitude I had that I couldn't deny and I asked myself... why? Are there other reasons I didn't want to preach on money? Is there something in me that I didn't want to confront? I've been called generous by some close to me, but to be honest, I don't always feel generous. I always wish I could do more, give more, somehow help more. You look around and you see the poor, you see the needs and you think, "what can I do to make any significant difference?"

I get overwhelmed when I see the needs around me. Months ago I saw a homeless woman outside the post office in tears, and a man talking to her, trying to help. That shook me up. That got me wanting and wishing that I could do more. And if we were honest, if we took all the resources in this room, while we could make a difference in a lot of lives, (and we should do all we can)s, there would still be tremendous need.

I should just preach the story of Jairus.

But then I saw something about this passage, this story of Jairus and his dying daughter that I never saw before. This was also a passage about the poor and the rich. This was also a passage about generosity, and meeting a need. **This was also a passage on giving.**

Even though we should be generous, even though we should give financially to those in need and trust God in our finances, we can give so much more than money.

Here was a man who was being laughed at and scoffed at in a time of tremendous pain, and Jesus **gave** comfort and hope, “don’t be afraid, just trust me.”

Here is a man whose daughter was dying, had died by the time he got to Jesus... which meant he had needs beyond his means that only Jesus could meet.

Jesus gave comfort, Jesus gave peace, Jesus gave hope, Jesus *gave* time, Jesus gave life.

Comfort, peace, hope, time, life... do these sound like needs in the world today?

I have seen the generosity in this church through Love Inc, and through helping others that have come through our doors. I also see in this Gospel

message that we, we who know Jesus, we are rich in hope, we rich in love, we are rich in compassion, and we can and should be generous with those who are in need of those things.

I believe my attitudes on giving had to do with having too small a picture of what giving can be, only looking at it from the aspect of money, when most of the needs around me have nothing to do with money. As I have reflected on how I give, and what I give, I couldn't help but to feel joy in the abilities we have to give in so many ways.

At this point, I realized I had no sermon, just surprise and amazement at how God continues to stretch me and open up to me more and more what life is like in His Kingdom.

I'm sure this won't be the last time, as it wasn't the first time that He has taught me about the surprising truths of how we can give. In attempting to prepare a sermon, my mind took me back to another time when God had a surprise and a lesson for me.

Story of the homeless man asking for change.

I was about 18 or 19 years old, when my mother asked if I would have a talk with my grandfather about his faith. My grandfather was in very poor health and had not attended church since my mother was a child. I remember well the fear I felt at the idea of speaking to him, my Grandfather, about God. But didn't know how much time he had left and couldn't imagine him passing without at least trying to talk to him about his faith.

I wish I could say the conversation went well. My grandfather told me that he thought that the word god came from someone misspelling the word good, and that everything else was just made up. While it was a bit of him attempting to make light of the situation, he made it clear through our conversation that he didn't believe anything other than he'd find out what was there after he'd die.

I remember driving home, it was late at night and my mind was racing. I didn't want to go home and be alone replaying the conversation in my mind, but wanted to be able to share what had happened with a friend, to pray with someone. Because of the late hour, I thought it was best to call before just dropping by. This was before cell phones were something that everyone had, when they cost a fortune and you had to carry a bag the size of a small suitcase to use it. So I had to look for a payphone.

I was on the freeway and just decided to take the next exit, not really thinking about the fact that this wasn't the best side of town to be stopping, and especially not at night. I pulled into the parking lot of the first convenience store I came across and parked right next to the payphone.

I immediately checked my pockets for change, and couldn't find any so I began to check the floor, to dig down into the seats, when all of a sudden I smelt a stench; filth and alcohol and at that point realized my windows were down and someone was at my passenger door. I had a moment of fear as the clearly homeless man at my window asked if I had any spare change. Probably from fear I chuckled and said I hadn't, and that I had in fact been digging for change for the payphone.

I'll never forget what happened next. He reached out his hand, holding something to hand to me, and said, "here." I replied, "What? No, no, keep your change, you were just asking me for change." He answered, "Yes, I was asking, but it looks like you need it, so here."

I was stunned. I was almost in shock... not knowing a moment like this could even be possible. I told him to wait a second as I got out of my car, walked around to the front, and sat on the hood and invited him to do that same. I asked

him his name, asked him his story. He told me about how his wife and him had separated. He told me about his children and how he hadn't seen them for a long time. I went and grabbed my Bible that was on my back seat... with me not because I was that spiritual, but because I was returning from the conversation with my grandfather. I got to read scripture to this man, to pray with him, and for him and his family. I couldn't give him any money, but I gave him something that no one else was there to give him. An ear, a word of encouragement, hope from scripture, and a brother to pray with.

In the back of my Bible that night I wrote down his name and the names of his wife and children and I continued to pray for them over the years. I have no idea what happened to him, but I have to believe that God had me there that night so I could give to someone who was not just poor financially, but poor in relationships, in hope, in knowing that there is a God who is real and who is there. **And God had made me rich in those areas so I could give generously that night.**

Let me challenge you that you are rich, whether financially or not, you are rich and there are those around you, those around me that I can give generously to with all God has given me.
