

**Convention of  
The Diocese of Eastern Oregon**

October 18, 2015

Job 38:1-7

Psalm 104:1-9, 25, 37b

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

Help us O God...

A week ago, Saturday, the New York Times ran an article on the 158 families across the country that have donated the most to the 2016 Presidential Campaign. According to the Times, these families have contributed at least \$176 million in the first phase of the campaign.

While it's tempting...very tempting to go off on a rant about this very small minority subverting democracy, that's not my point this morning. I will note, however, that I'm sure all these donors want is what the two sons of Zebedee wanted. They want to sit on the right and left of the candidate they are supporting if and when that candidate wins the Presidency. That aside, what really got to me were comments in the article about the nature of the leaders of these families.

"It's a lot of families around the country who are self-made who feel like over-regulation puts these burdens on smaller companies,' said Doug Deason, a Dallas investor whose family put \$5 million behind Gov. Rick Perry of Texas. 'They've done well. They want to see other people do well.'"

Under the headline, "Tend to Be Self Made", the New York Times provides a chart showing that 119 had what the Times called, "Self-made Wealth" and 37 had "Inherited Wealth."

David McCurdy, a former Oklahoma congressman who is now president of the American Gas Association (not much of a leap, there!) said of these donors "When I look at these families, these are highly successful people, they're used to moving mountains, and they love to beat the conventional wisdom."

To those who think they are "self-made"... and to each of us, sadly, who forgets all we have been given, I hear God's words to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"

Or as Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*,

"God said:

"Why do you confuse the issue?

Why do you talk without knowing what you're talking about?

Pull yourself together, Job!

Up on your feet! Stand tall!  
I have some questions for you,  
and I want some straight answers.  
Where were you when I created the earth?  
Tell me, since you know so much!  
Who decided on its size? Certainly you'll know that!  
Who came up with the blueprints and measurements?  
How was its foundation poured,  
and who set the cornerstone,  
While the morning stars sang in chorus  
and all the angels shouted praise?

Who do we think we are? We may have been created just a little lower than the gods, but we often tend to let that idea go to our heads and forget that all we are and all we have are gifts from our Creator.

Our Eucharistic prayer C helps to remind us when we read "At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth our island home." The prayer continues, "From the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill. You made us the rulers of creation."

God has indeed given us everything. God mockingly affirms that in his words to Job and the 104th Psalm confirms that. We acknowledge that in the Eucharistic prayer. But when we walk out of church, do we believe it?

Or do we believe that God gave us the grandness of creation and we've had to fight tooth and nail for our portion of it? Do we believe that it is our hard work, our education, our skill that has gotten us to where we are today? How many of us believe we are self-made?

The way we decide between the two alternatives of believing in God's awesome abundance or believing in our own hard work most often determines how generous we are. Of course, most of us, I believe fall somewhere in between those two options; and we try to find our way along that middle course

But here's some good news. Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his book, "In God's Hands" says, "This is a God who intervenes on our behalf, not because we deserve it, but because God's love is freely given. It is grace. It is not earned; it cannot be earned. It does not need to be earned." Think on that for a moment. God's grace does not need to be earned.

In today's Gospel, Jesus declares that the path to greatness is through being a servant. "For the Son of Humanity came not to be served but to serve."

So we have a choice to make. We can choose to see ourselves as self-made or servants. That is what each of us is called to be in our Baptismal vows and which we affirm today.

Being servants calls us to open our hearts to living generously. My friend, Dave Toycen, writes in his book, "The Power of Generosity", "I believe we have to make a choice between people being encouraged in their lives or being discouraged. And that matters for both spiritual and moral reasons. The idea that everyone should be left alone to hope for the best is grossly inadequate. I have experienced the personal joy and uplift when someone goes out of his or her way to be generous and caring. If I am generous to someone, that person will likely be generous to someone else. There is an argument to be made that the universe was created to operate this way."

We are called to embrace a generosity in and with all things. Generosity in friendships. Generosity in spirit. Generosity by inviting others to worship. Generosity in forgiveness. Generosity in volunteering. Generosity with money.

Being generous with our money, and even talking about such generosity is difficult.

Toycen also writes about this challenge. "Money is a resource that provides food, shelter and clothing. It's a human construct that gives order to the exchange of things that we value. In our capitalist world, it's the only way to get on and get along. But there is a difference between a rightful place in our lives and one that dominates and becomes obsessive."

He continues, "Money gets worshipped, as something in itself, which will bring satisfaction and fulfillment. The tool suddenly becomes the prized possession instead of a step in a process that leads to a fulfilled life. The choice faces everyone. The Bible says you cannot serve God and money. The statement is making a point that you cannot have a transcendent value in your life while still holding money of equal importance. You have to make a choice. Your ultimate value will come in conflict with your desire to gain and hold money at all costs."

Think about what is important in your life. How important is money? Is it a tool for you or a master of you? I have to admit it's been both at different times in my life. My wife and I have not always used it wisely and we have not always given generously. Though we strive to tithe, we haven't always succeeded. What I've learned, however, is that we are happiest when we are being generous. Generosity frees us to live a life that is positive, transformational, and meaningful.

Acknowledging God's generosity to us and living into that generosity transforms our lives. Embracing God's generosity will help us make our churches thriving communities of faith that will transform our world.

John F. Kennedy finished his inaugural address with these words, "With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

Said another way, Teresa of Avila wrote:

"Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours."

At the table, we will be given the bread and wine made holy with words affirming that for us, they are the body and blood of Jesus. We take them to give us meaning, salvation, and strength. We take them so that we can be Christ's body in the world and do the work God is calling us to do.

Our generosity can never match God's awesome abundance in creation and in our lives, but that must not keep us from living generously and giving abundantly to God's work here in Eastern Oregon and beyond. It is only through our generosity with our money, our time, and our abilities, that we can transform our communities. Each of us, as followers of Jesus is called to serve tirelessly and give generously for such transformation.

Amen