

## **Receiving**

1 Tim 1: 12-17

Mark 10: 17-31

March 14, 2021

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

### *1 Tim 1: 12-17*

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

### *Mark 10: 17-31*

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

---

From early childhood we have all heard that it is more blessed to give than to receive, that when we give we are reflecting back all that we have been given by God. Giving is generous, faithful, kind and loving. Giving will bring joy and will make us and the other happy.

One of my favorite quotes about giving comes from Winston Churchill, “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” Giving is indeed one of the best character traits to have, giving is a faithful lifestyle. In the Book of Acts (20:35), Luke says, “In all of this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

But here is the twist. Jesus is credited and quoted for words not offered in any of the Gospels. Neither Matthew, Mark, Luke nor John quote Jesus with this phrase that is considered essential not only to Christianity, but to any caring, compassionate and considerate person. Yet we can easily imagine Jesus sharing these words, teaching this as a part of a lesson. If you think about it though, can't you more likely imagine hearing Jesus teach that while it is blessed to give, we must also know how to receive?

How often we find ourselves in the role of the giver. It is a comfortable place to be, comfortable by our actions, by our faith beliefs and by our ability to freely offer what we have to someone in need, someone who would like and enjoy what we choose to give away. Yet I cannot imagine that this would be the whole lesson. If we do not know how to receive, if we do not know how to value receiving, how then can we be humbled, willing, and ready, to receive the unconditional love and grace of God, or the generosity of others? If we cannot receive, how can we value what we are given while also recognizing our need to receive from others? How can we hear and truly receive the grace upon grace from God's fullness which we have all received?

It is easier to give than to receive, but that does not make it better. Something as simple as a compliment will bear that out. Think of how you feel when you offer a genuine compliment to someone. Now think about how you feel when you receive a compliment—how you perhaps blush, deny or minimize the kind words offered to you.

It is easier to give than to receive, but that does not make it better. In fact, if anything it places a separation, a boundary, a value judgement, to only want to be a giver rather a receiver. When we give, we have the ability to do so conditionally. As the rich man who sought to follow Jesus found it impossible to give away his possessions and give the money to the poor, his approach came from his wealth rather than his need to share. He lived a good faithful life and was prepared to conditionally offer from a portion of his means. What he could not do was to be humbled as a receiver, to see what it would look like to be as one of the poor, to give everything away so that he was as poor as the ones who would receive his giving. He could give from his abundance, yet he could not receive from a place of emptiness, a place of his own neediness.

To be a receiver is to acknowledge our own dependence upon God, upon others. Receiving is an honest and humbling place to be. It is a faithful place to be. Paul persecuted followers of Jesus until God's grace and mercy blindly humbled him on the road to Damascus, and he was able, as he says, to receive “mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

Erik Klobell\* tells of seeing a beggar in a NYC subway station. Many people passed by and most left some coins and occasionally some folded cash. Yet in their giving as they dropped their donations, no one acknowledged the beggar. Their giving eyes and hands were focused on the ratty collection cup. There was no sense of seeing another person, but rather a victim of his circumstances that would never happen to them. “He was an alien, whom they were willing to help out but whose story was likely lost on them. After a few minutes another man came along, stopped, took some money out of his billfold, put it in the cup, and extended his hand to the beggar. They shook on the deal as if they were consummating a business transaction, the donor saying, ‘And have a good day, sir,’ smiling, and then moving on. I suppose there are any number

of ways to interpret this little vignette, but I chose to see it as one man seeing the other not his inferior but his equal.” In offering dignity, in recognizing the humanity behind the layers of disheveled clothing, the one who offered cash and a handshake, the one who offered care and a human touch, received the humbling reminder that we are no less hungry for love than those to whom we extend it.

Today we receive our One Great Hour of Sharing offering. We receive the special mission offering of the United Church of Christ which involves us in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, we are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery. Through OGHS we engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women’s empowerment. Today we receive the offering that helps to meet immediate needs and address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place. We receive the humbling reminder that we are no less hungry for love than those to whom we extend it. When we can hold onto this realization, we can more openly and freely receive from others, receive from God, and affirm our emptiness, our dependency, our own inability to pay for the priceless everything that sustains our lives. We receive, we accept, our offering to One Great Hour of Sharing. We receive, we accept, our shared humanity in the unconditional love of God. Amen.

\* Klobell, Erik, *The God of Second Chances*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008, pp 114-115