



Spreading Hope

Stewardship, Generosity and Giving

Scripture

2 Kings 4:1-11
Jeremiah 32:1-15
1 Peter 4:8-11

Hymn Suggestions

663 God, whose giving knows no ending
637 Take my life, and let it be consecrated
585 Christ, you call us all to service
587 Called as partners in Christ's service
648 I'm gonna live so God can use me

Responsive Call to Worship

In a world where many feel helpless,
We gather to be reminded that our help is in the name of the Lord.

**In a world where many think that there is no hope,
We gather to be reminded that our hope is in Christ.**

Together we lift our voices to God, our maker and sustainer;
The One in whom we hope, the One in whom we trust.

**Together we serve our church and our world
sharing God's love with everyone we meet.**

Together we lift our hearts in joyful praise.
Come, let us worship God.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Adoration

Blessed be your name Lord, for your love and mercy is sure.

Your word shaped creation and your fingers flung the stars into the heavens.
You breathed life into the world and you continue to build your kingdom.
You created us in your image and you call us your own.

Even when humanity strayed, you called us back to you,

meeting betrayal with faithfulness and brokenness with mercy and love.

In Jesus Christ you came to us, giving new life to all.
We gather this day to give you our thanks and praise.

Confession

As we contemplate the glory of your presence, we grow mindful of our own failures.
There have been words and actions that we regret.
There have been thoughts that bring us shame.
For words of healing left unsaid and acts of generosity left undone, forgive us Lord.
Bless us with your grace, that the sin that so easily entangles might not stifle the journey of discipleship that you have set us on.
May your grace reign in us so that the result might be praise and glory and honour.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord, yours is an eternal generosity, a giving that knows no ending.
We come to you as beneficiaries of a grace that spills into our world in all kinds of ways, from many directions.

We pray today, that we might see and know the truth about our situation deep in our hearts; that we would appreciate the depth and the richness with which we have been and continue to be blessed.

We thank you for material comfort, for wealth of relationships and for joys both human and divine.

We are surrounded with voices that stoke our fears about scarcity and want and play on our insecurities.

Save us from the restless heart that feeds on greed, from those who foster habits of consumption and entitlement for their own advantage.

Help us to choose our luxuries carefully and to learn how to share them in ways that build up relationships and strengthen people in love and in gratitude.

Help us to lay up treasure in heaven where it is safe from the uncertainties, grief and anxieties of the marketplace.

Grounded in your generosity, may we be open to share and to participate in it.
In you we lack no good thing. May our world be shaped by the reality of your abundance rather than by illusions, disordered desires and distorted imaginations.

We thank you for the opportunities you give us as a congregation to conduits of your

generosity. When we live in your image we find our true selves. May we know ways beyond our ability to count the joy of giving.

Nourish seeds of generosity and hospitality in us so that we can be a community of your people and a witness to the life that really is life. Help us swim against the stream of individualism and the loneliness and isolation and spiritual death to which it leads.

We pray for our congregation. Even as we stay physically distant, we pray that you will continue to work through us, that our community, our country, and our world, will know your love.

We pray for those who are struggling;
for those who are sick,
for those have lost work,
for those who are lonely and uncertain,
We pray that You would be with them on the journey,
providing comfort and hope .
(Name specific people here)

We pray for all those who have spent many months working on the front lines;
for health care workers and those who support them,
for those store clerks and bus drivers and delivery people who are providing services we need to sustain life,
for any who are out there serving people, sharing joy and comfort.
We pray that You would ease their fears and anxieties and wipe away their tiredness.
(Name any specific people here you know.)

We pray for all those whose businesses and livelihoods are at risk.
Help us to support them in tangible ways.

We pray for families and teachers and camps and all programs providing mental health care and support for children and young people.
Instill in them patience and give them hope.

We pray for programs serving people who are homeless, marginalized and isolated.
We pray that you will infuse them with your strength, your love and joy.
(Name any specific programs here.)

We pray for our government leaders at every level,
for Your wisdom to guide them,
for an end to blaming and a willingness to work together.
We give thanksgiving for their willingness to serve.

We pray for the people of India who continue to face this surge in sickness.
Help the world to fill the lack of medical equipment.
Give breath to those who are struggling to breathe.

We pray, Lord, that this pandemic will end soon.

In all that we do, we know you are always with us, that you are a God of love, joy, peace and hope. Help us share your love with the world.

Amen.

Children's Story

How many of you take your lunch to school? You probably carry it in a bag. Well, I have a lunch bag with me today.

Show the bag without showing contents.

Now, I have a question for you. Do you think there is enough food in this bag to feed every person in your church? No? Are you sure? Well, let's look inside.

Open up the bag and take out a package or handful of seeds.

This bag is full of seeds! If we took these seeds, planted them in soil, watered them and let them grow, do you think we would have enough to feed everyone? Yes? You're right! We'd have even more!

Let us look more closely at these seeds.

Hold seeds up close to camera.

What I am holding in my hands is POTENTIAL. With potential, something little can grow and become bigger and better. Though they are just small, these seeds can grow into food for us to eat. One seed can become many vegetables, and from each vegetable you can get many more seeds which can also be planted.

When we share what we have with our church, we are sharing our potential with God. And God can do REALLY great things with our gifts. Just like God makes the seeds grow, God can grow our gifts so that they make a difference—for many years to come!

Prayer:

Dear God, we are only small, but with you in our lives we have the potential to do great things. Help us use our potential to do your work so that, with your help, we can share Your hope with the world! AMEN.

Sermon: Spreading Hope

It's a crazy time to buy a piece of property. There's a war on. Jerusalem is under siege and Jeremiah has been arrested for telling the king of Judah that resistance is futile: the land is going to fall.

And suddenly, he has the chance to buy a field. A sort of 'right of first refusal' situation. It's not a wise economic decision. The field has been stripped of anything of value, and the Babalonian army is camped on it. Jeremiah has just prophesied 70 years of Babylonian rule.

But he makes it clear that he bought the field because God promised that that the land **would** be restored to the people—that one day vineyards would grow there again and fields would be bought and sold. So he takes the deed and seals it in a jar to keep it safe—because it is not a question of IF God's promises would be fulfilled but WHEN they would be fulfilled.

Jeremiah did not question God; he trusted in God's promise, and had hope for something more. By buying the field, he put his faith into action. And in doing this crazy act, he spread hope to others.

Right now we are living in the midst of a pandemic. It's a time of physical distancing and rules and more rules and changing rules. News is filled with stories of violence and poverty. We're bombarded with messages of individualism & consumerism. We're told now is time to close the ranks, withdraw to our homes and wait. Fear, loneliness, despair and anxiety dominate.

But our God is a God of Hope.

The Bible shares the story of God's love, throughout the centuries and generations. It is in that love that we find hope for the future. And that hope gives us the courage to live out God's call in our lives.

We may not have a plot of land we can buy as a symbol of hope but, like Jeremiah, our actions can live out our faith.

And we call that **STEWARDSHIP**.

In the church, we often use three words interchangeably: **stewardship, giving and generosity**.

But they are really three distinct (though connected) concepts.

Stewardship is the management of resources belonging to someone else.

Giving is the act of sharing something of value.

Generosity is the amplitude and attitude with which we give.

From the very beginning, the Bible tells us that we are created by God and everything we have belongs to God. As God's stewards we are called to use EVERYTHING God has given us to show our love for God: to care for one another and to look after God's creation. We can't be stewards of God—whose very nature is giving—without giving resources away: time, talent, treasure.

The Bible shows us that giving can care for the poor, build people up, instill dignity, celebrate life. It can also assert power differences, make people feel dependent, take advantage of people.

As Christians, we want to give the way God gives: generously, abundantly, unconditionally, sharing love, joy and faith. And when we do, when our actions live out our faith, like a deed being sealed in a jar, hope spreads.

I've learned a lot about stewardship, giving, generosity and hope working with PCC partners around the world. One profound lesson came early in my career when I was visiting projects in Central America which had been supported through PWS&D.

A group of us sat in a circle under a tree, while the director of one of the programs read the passage we heard earlier (II Kings 4:1-11), and then told us why the story of this widow, asking Elisha for help in her time of desperate need, was an important scripture to her.

She said that in Nicaragua there are many women, like the widow, raising families on their own. Like the widow, who was about to lose her two sons as slaves to pay off her debts, many of them felt like they were losing their children to despair, drugs, poverty, gangs. So she was particularly interested the response from Elisha, the prophet, the man of God.

Who knows what the widow was expecting—maybe some charity so she could pay off the creditor, at least for awhile. I don't think she was expecting Elisha's question: What do you have in your house? She might have been a bit confused. If she had very much, she wouldn't be there!

But she thinks for a bit and says she has a little bit of oil.

We can work with that, Elisha says. And he gives her instructions: Go to your neighbours. Borrow some vessels—and not just a few.

The widow has to take her faith and put it into action. She has to trust Elisha. She gathers the vessels, locks herself in a room with her children and starts to pour the oil—and then the oil keeps flowing and flowing, until all the vessels are full, and then it stops.

The widow takes the oil back to Elisha and asks what to do. He tells her she can sell it, pay the debts, and live off the rest.
He gives her HOPE.

This story teaches us about how God gives—in a way that cares for and nurtures the recipient. It helps us see that God has given everyone gifts. It helps us think about how we can give in a way that restores dignity, that walks with people in their journey, that empowers them to use their gifts in a way that shares hope.

But the director also said it taught her something as one who gives. Sometimes she felt like the widow. She came from a poor community herself. She didn't have a lot of resources. The needs she saw around her were SO great—systemic problems which created high unemployment in Nicaragua, that forced people to migrate from their communities to find work and send remittances back home. She saw despair all around her, and felt helpless. She would go to God and pray for the people in her community, asking for—demanding—help.

This scripture reminded her to see the gifts she had—what God had given her, even when she thought she had nothing—and to see how she could use those gifts to respond to the needs around her. She took her courage and determination and started programs. A breakfast program for kids at school, with local shops donating supplies. Small income generating projects with women in the community.

And people saw, and funding came from partners like PWS&D, and the projects grew. And she had peace, because she was doing what she could, where she could, with all the resources made available to her. And when she did, she was surprised by how the gifts grew, how people donated goods and time and opportunities in ways beyond her imagination.

God blessed the work and the oil kept flowing and flowing.
And HOPE spread That's how giving—and stewardship—works. We all have something to give.
And when we give our gifts to God, in the way God gives, the oil keeps flowing.

God gives without expectation of return

One of my favourite passages is the one where Jesus heals the 10 lepers and only one of them returns to give thanks. Often the story is about the one who returns—a reminder to us to be grateful, and not to be afraid to express gratitude—good reminders. But I like the idea that Jesus healed ALL the lepers. Jesus knew they wouldn't all return to give thanks, but he healed them all anyway. There was no prerequisite, nothing they had to do to earn the healing. It was freely given.

God gives to all

When Jesus taught us what it means to be good neighbours, he told the story of a good Samaritan. The Samaritan happened upon a victim of crime and saw him and his needs. He didn't care that the victim was of a different religion or a different ethnicity. That didn't matter to him. He used his own resources—his money—to help and asked nothing in return, simply going on his way after taking care of the man.

God's gifts are given in love

People know when a gift is given in love. People know when it is cheerfully given. People know when it is given reluctantly. People know when it is given to gain favour. And so does God.

When a woman poured expensive perfume on Jesus (perfume worth a year's wages) some of the disciples grumbled, imagining all it could have accomplished for the poor. (I can relate.) The disciples missed the point. Jesus showed them the heart of the giver—and how she was showing her deep love for Jesus with her gift. And he graciously accepted it.

The Bible is filled with stories of stewardship and of giving.

As stewards, we are called to give the way God gives. Extravagantly, unconditionally, with nothing expected in return.

When we give to our congregation—we give with love, generously, without the expectation of return. We trust God will bless our gifts—as they participate in God's mission, share God's love in our community, provide a place of praise and worship for people to come, and people to carry the Good news out from—and our gifts will be blessed, and the oil will keep flowing.

When our congregation gives to Presbyterians Sharing—the mission and ministry fund of our denomination—and Presbyterian World Service & Development—our church's development and relief agency—we give with love, generously, extravagantly, without the expectation of return. We trust God will bless our gifts—as they join gifts from Presbyterians across Canada to participate in God's mission—sending mission staff around the world, equipping congregations, training students, caring for the vulnerable. And this year—particularly helping congregations and communities adapt to challenges brought on by COVID 19.

We may not be able to travel to India to care for people affected by COVID—but we are standing with our PCC partners in India, both through the PWS&D appeal and by encouraging and supporting our long term mission partners through Presbyterians Sharing.

Years ago, a consultant evaluating PWS&D programs wrote of the PCC partners working in India. She found that PWS&D's programs/projects were well planned and successfully implemented, but they were also successful because of the “never-ending, hopeful optimism” the workers had in light of “the hard realities they face in areas of excessive poverty, unspeakable violence, human rights abuse, natural disasters and human calamities.”

That hopeful optimism in the midst of despair came from their faith, their willingness to never give up and to use all the gifts God had sent them—to do whatever they could to make a difference, spreading hope.

It is with this same spirit that PCC partners are responding to COVID 19 in India today—and your gifts will give them hope, just as they continue to share hope with to us.

And by these gifts we give, by the way we choose to live our lives through this pandemic and beyond, we will spread HOPE, in our community and around the world.

Like the purchase of a piece of property, in the midst of a war.

Sermon by Karen Plater, Associate Secretary, Stewardship & Planned Giving. Reflection on Jeremiah passage inspired by Presbyterians Sharing service 2019 prepared by the Rev. Amanda Bolton-Henderson.

Call for the Offering

God loves a cheerful, courageous and confident giver.

People of the One whose giving knows no ending, people of the Risen Christ: with trust and gladness we come together to present our tithes and offerings, grateful for who we are and who we can become in faith, hope and love.

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, in countless ways you have gifted us with your amazing grace.

What joy is ours to be of you and for you through Christ our Lord!

As instruments of God's good news,
we give what we have and who we are.

By your Spirit, encourage and equip us in the service of Christ
so that all people may know of your love and experience HOPE in you.

We dedicate our gifts in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Benediction and Commissioning

May the seeds of faith and hope we plant continue to grow and multiply among us.

And may we see ourselves, not just receivers of your abundant grace, but also as instruments of your grace.

Accompany us into the world, as we share the wealth you have entrusted to us and plant seeds of hope, today and for generations to come.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.