Give All You Can
I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19
November 1, 2015

Crises have the potential of bringing out the best in us - at least if we aren't the one experiencing the crisis! We are aware of the traumatic experience of migrants streaming into Europe in a desperate effort to escape the warfare and terrorism in their homelands. Nearly 2 million Syrian refugees live in Turkey.

In July a Turkish bride and groom living near the Syrian border invited 4,000 Syrian refugees to their wedding party. The idea came from the groom's father, who hoped their example would inspire others. The couple pooled money they had received from family members to throw the party and wedding guests contributed additional food. They used food trucks to serve the crowd and the bride and groom even served some meals. The bride admitted her shock upon first hearing the plan, but was happy to share the wedding meal with people in real need. The groom said, "Seeing the happiness in the eyes of the Syrian refugee children is just priceless. We started our journey to happiness with making others happy and that's a great feeling." The story illustrates how the act of giving increases the joy not only of the recipients, but also of the givers.

New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof and his wife, Cheryl WuDunn, have a relatively new book called, A Path Appears. They share stories of people and organizations that have made a difference in the lives of the less fortunate. In speaking about their book, Kristof said, "Helping others is good for you, it makes you feel better, and it makes you live longer." Volunteering, being part of a religious group, or spending time helping those in need are all activities which have been shown to decrease mortality rates. Citing new studies on people's brain reactions to giving and receiving, he said, "For about half of Americans, the pleasure centers would light up more when you give than when you get." Their book confirms what the Bible has long taught: giving is good for us; it is even a source of joy.

In recent weeks we've been listening to the advice of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, who gave three simple rules for using the "excellent gift of money." He encourages us to earn all we can through diligence but without harming ourselves or others. He encourages us to save all we can, for the temptation is great to waste money in idle ways. I understand that last Sunday I pricked the conscience with some of Wesley's examples of extravagant spending and the distinction between wants and needs. Do not fear that Wesley wanted us
to live austere lives deprived of all good things. Having earned all we can and been frugal to save some, we have money left so we can give all we can and experience the joy of giving.

Wesley instructs wise stewards to spend what is necessary to care for their own needs. Next he tells us to care for our household, providing food, clothing, housing, and more. With the surplus, he encourages us to give to the household of faith. If there is more, we are called to use it for the benefit of all people. He said, "Employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all men [and women]." iii Although Wesley himself was fairly disciplined in all things, today he might be convinced that we also have emotional needs which are sometimes met through play time, hobbies, fun, entertainment, and a bit of self-indulgence.

The sincere purpose of Wesley's rules was to help people draw near to God, to move toward holiness of heart and life, to grow into sainthood. Generosity is a quality of saints, both saints who continue to live among us and those who have gone before into the communion of saints. Those who grow close to God through Christ experience the great joy of giving.

Today we remember those from this community of faith and others from our own families and life journeys who have joined the communion of saints. Among the people whom we remember are spouses, siblings, parents, children, friends who gave of themselves in the service of God, family, church, community, and nation. They earned livings as a teacher, a bookkeeper, musicians, a mechanic, a deputy sheriff, as a civil servant, and a chaplain. Many of them were parents, striving to give unconditional love to the children given them as blessings of God. With their talents and time, they blessed us with new learnings, music played, sung and taught; safe communities; services needed by others; and faith in God. We celebrate the gifts given and received, and the joy multiplied through their giving.

Life gives us the opportunity to reach beyond ourselves to do good for others. Today's Holiday Faire featuring alternative gift items is one such opportunity. You are a generous congregation, serving, giving, and offering yourselves in a multitude of ways for the enrichment of life and faith.

There was a farmer who grew excellent quality corn. Every year he won the award for the best grown corn. One year a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew his corn. The farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbors. "How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbors when they are entering corn in competition with
yours each year?" the reporter asked.

"Why, sir," said the farmer. "Didn't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbors grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbors grow good corn."

So it is with our lives. Those who want to live meaningfully and well must help enrich the lives of others, for the value of a life is measured by the lives it touches. And those who choose to be happy must help others find happiness; for the welfare of each is bound up with the welfare of all. iv

On this All Saints Day, we celebrate the gift of faith. We rejoice in the gifts given and received by the saints who have gone before and the saints who live among us. We remember that giving increases the joy of the recipient and the giver. May we live into the wisdom of giving all we can for our own welfare and our families, for the household of faith, and for the good of the human community.

Generous Creator, you provide everything we need to sustain and enjoy life. Our lives are blessed by the wealth of relationships, opportunities, education, and health we enjoy. We are grateful for your continual care.

We place our hope in you to care not only for us but also for the welfare of others. We pray for many who continue to struggle economically, who are seeking employment and affordable housing. Inspire our compassion and guide our actions so that we know how to serve those who come to the doorstep of this church and who live in this community in need of assistance.

With you, O God, we seek the welfare of your people around the world. Renew the hope and strength of migrants seeking safety, of victims of violence and abuse, of those recovering from disaster. Come to the aid of those struggling with addictions.

We pray that the healing touch of Christ would rest upon all living with illness or chronic conditions ....

Guide us, Loving God, toward growth in godliness, that we might reflect your qualities of love, gentleness, righteousness, and generosity. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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iii  John Wesley, "The Use of Money," Sermon 50.

iv  Stephen Kaczor.

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