September 21, 2014

Matthew 20:1-16

*Five Love Languages: Receiving Gifts*

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Matthew 20:1-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’  So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

We are talking about the five love languages that Gary Chapman shares in his book, The Five Love Languages: words of affirmation, receiving gifts, acts of service, physical touch, and quality time. Chapman says that we all experience and communicate love differently. Every one of us has one or two of the five love languages that we primarily identity with. If you do not know your love language, I want to encourage you to go online to [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com) and take a quick quiz. And the hope is that by talking about each of the love languages we will better be able to love. We are a people saved by grace who are called to love. Our life is a gift to God and we are called to love one another, to respect all people, to share with those in need. So, today we talk about receiving gifts.

Don’t mistake this love language for materialism; the receiver of gifts thrives on the love, thoughtfulness, and effort behind the gift. If you speak this love language, the perfect gift or gesture shows that you are known, you are cared for, and you are prized above whatever was sacrificed to bring the gift to you. A missed birthday, anniversary, or a hasty, thoughtless gift would be disastrous—so would the absence of everyday gestures.

Gifts are tangible symbols of love. When the gift can be seen or held, one is instantly reminded of the thought and effort behind it.  Gifts communicate thoughtful love. Gary Chapman says there are three things that make a great gift:  it is personal, it is thoughtful, and it is generous . Some people feel most loved when they receive a great gift. It is not about how much the gift costs, but the time, effort, and preparation that goes into a loving gift.

Does anyone like to receive flowers? What makes them special is the time spent picking out the flowers. That effort shows your love. And when the flowers are long gone, we remember and value that gift of love.

My first Sunday as the pastor at Greenland Hills in July 2013, Bell Gream gave me this picture of me preaching in the pulpit of this church. I treasure that gift.

Many folks here know about our Global Village Market, the alternative Christmas market that brings together charitable organizations and fair-trade retailers to offer a truly unique holiday shopping experience. It is an opportunity to highlight those organizations that we have a passion for here at Greenland Hills. In fact, if there is an organization that you are passionate about, please let Judy Kline know. We give gifts as a congregation to other charitable organizations because that is who we are here at Greenland Hills.

Many folks in the last few weeks have been taking Lynn Smith to the hospital for cancer treatment or have brought meals to the Quicksall family. And with each turn in the car or with each meal that is prepared, the person is praying for Lynn or for the Quicksall family. Time, effort, skill and intention join together to wrap Lynn and the Quicksall family in the warmth of God’s love and the love of our congregation.

Does anyone re-gift? I used to have a closet where I would keep the gifts I wanted to re-gift. My husband helped me to realize that if I didn’t want the gift, then no one else probably wanted the gift either. If you are someone who re-gifts, then your love language is not receiving gifts. And if receiving gifts is not your love language, this is a reminder that we give with no expectations of receiving anything in return. Gifts come with no strings attached. I remember talking with someone and they had not received a thank you note for a gift that they had given, so they had decided that they were never going to give this person a gift again. This is a word that I really need to hear because I have stopped giving a family member Christmas presents because I never received anything in return. The woman who washed Jesus feet did not receive anything in return. Jesus did not bless her, she was not healed, Jesus did not forgive her sins. But the woman who washed Jesus’ feet was blessed because she gave Jesus a gift that he embraced and welcomed. She gave her gifts with no expectation for them to be reciprocated.

Attitude means everything, so we give out of love, out of appreciation, not out of obligation, not out of a need to keep score. When the Apostle Paul writes to the Church about giving, he says, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7 NRSV). There are three things that make a great gift: it is personal, it is thoughtful, and it is generous. And when we give, God further increases our capacity for generosity.

The story that Jesus shares in our scripture reading is a story about a gift from the landowner. And many can not get past the fact that it does not appear that the landowner is fair. But the landowner pays a fair day’s wages. No one in this story is deprived or shortchanged. What scandalizes the workers who arrived early to the vineyard isn’t that they are cheated by the landowner but that their coworkers benefit from the landowner’s generosity without earning it. It’s such a universal and familiar reaction it’s hard not to see ourselves in it. We idolize success and self-sufficiency and gifts are expected to be deserved.[[1]](#footnote-2)

This isn’t that sort of Kingdom, Jesus is saying. It’s not about the pay; it’s about the work. You don’t pull yourself up by your bootstraps; you simply take my hand. And here we get to the punch line of the parable: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” asks the landowner. “Or are you envious because I am generous? This parable isn’t about the workers. It’s about the landowner.  This is God’s vineyard, God’s table, God’s Kingdom and God’s world. Our God isn’t fair. Our God is irrationally and irresponsibly generous.[[2]](#footnote-3)

If we want in on this Kingdom, if we want in on this work, we best set aside our small notions of what it means to deserve, what it means to be fair, and what it means to earn. What makes God’s grace offensive isn’t who it leaves out, but who it lets in, starting with you and me. Fair's got nothing to do with it.[[3]](#footnote-4)

A man dies and goes to heaven. St. Peter meets him at the pearly gates. St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in." Okay, " the man says, "I was married to the same women for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points." Three points?" He says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service." Terrific!" say's St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point." "One point? Well I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says. "Two points!" The man cries. "At this rate the only way to get into heaven is by the grace of God!" St. Peter smiled. "There's your 100 points! Come on in!"[[4]](#footnote-5)

Life comes to us as gift, a free and divine gift. And, therefore, the greatest humility and obedience is to accept the gift, to say yes – in joy and gratitude. God gives us a heart full of compassion and love and generosity. We love because God first loved us. We give because God first gives to us. Love well. Live well. Give well.

1. http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/lectionary-workers-vineyard-landowner [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/lectionary-workers-vineyard-landowner [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/lectionary-workers-vineyard-landowner [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. from [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com) weekly sermon illustration email [↑](#footnote-ref-5)