

United Methodist Church

Solon, IA

November 6, 2011

Rev C A Kress

Scripture:

1 Timothy 6

“As for those who in the present age are rich; command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

Defined by Generosity

There was a video presentation by Rev Adam Hamilton entitled "TITHING AND THE 10 APPLES" which gave a pointed yet humorous explanation of tithing and our temptation to avoid giving to God through the church as scripture states.

There's power in the act of tithing. And, yes, I'm one of the leaders of this church and yes, this church is feeling especially sensitive about our stewardship campaign this year. But please don't think that our concern is solely with keeping the lights on, salaries paid and assuring Marian is here to play on Sunda for worship. Our church has a much higher purpose than this. I plan to illustrate it by telling three stories:

Story #1: I just helped lead a Walk to Emmaus Spiritual Retreat for women. One of the young pilgrims told me about her church in _(nearby community)_ and how she became involved there. She explained she had been a struggling mother of young children. They were new to the community and funds were tight. As many of us know; a good way to keep her children fully clothed and happy was to shop garage sales.

The local United Methodist church was holding a garage sale one week, so she went there to shop. But the garage sale was like none of the others. They were friendly to her. In particular one helper approached her soon after she walked into the room. This kind, older woman said: “I don't know you, but my name is Ruth. What is your name? How old are your children?” And the little helper engaged her in a pleasant conversation. The new mother picked up a few items of clothing for the

children. When she paid for them, little Ruth said, "Do you and your children go to church?" The mother said, "No, we're new to town". And Ruth said, "Oh – you should come to church here! It would please me to see you and your children next Sunday." Then Ruth slipped a pamphlet about the church into this mother's shopping bag.

The young mother was impressed by this welcoming gesture. She took up Ruth's invitation. The next Sunday Ruth greeted her and her children and they started down the road of friendship. This was three or four years ago and now they're fast friends. The young mother is there all the time because she helps with Sunday school. It all began with a garage sale. Our fund raisers are not simply for the purpose of paying our bills, they are also a doorway by which we can bring people to Christ.

There's something about a church with its lights on and doors open and kind faces inside of it that makes a difference. Just the presence of a good and caring church gives hope to the entire community. If we must organize a garage sale or tenderloin feed to assure the church can shine that light; let's do it with a smile on our faces and an invitation to worship on our lips.

Your support allows our church to be a visible symbol of an invisible love.

Story #2: This story took place in another community, but I'll never forget that day. It was a typical morning in the church on one of the minor-but-holy days (perhaps Ash Wednesday). A young woman with tears in her eyes came bursting into the church. She had just been at a service which had been held at another church in the community. She was so upset, and visibly shaking.

I had not met this girl before, but I was at her side immediately. And she told me what had happened to her. That morning she had attended worship at another local church. It came time to celebrate communion during the service. So she stood up and got in line to receive communion. As she went down the aisle an usher put his hand on her shoulder and steered her away. You see, the membership didn't know her, and they wanted to assure she was baptized and a member of their

denomination. When she reported that she was not a member. The usher told her that she wasn't welcome at the communion table.

So she had fled the service in tears, found her way down the block and into our dear little United Methodist Church. After telling her story we went to the Communion Table where we lit candles and shared Christ's meal. I am so proud to serve in a denomination where anyone who feels empty or broken or in need of forgiveness or who just desires a richer experience of Christ in their lives is always welcome to come and to receive. This church points to a power, love and grace which much greater than any of us can comprehend.

Story #3: This one was told to be by my friend Lucinda, who lives in a nearby community. Lucinda shared that in 2008 she had extra money which wasn't ear-marked for anything. But she wanted to do something with it that would shine a light for someone else. So, she decided to give each of her children \$100. She sent the money in a asking them to use the money for someone else. She simply wanted her children (who were in their 20's), to send a letter back sharing how they used the money.

Her son (who lives in Ames) sent an e-mail back telling of his experience. He wrote,

“Mom, I finally decided what I wanted to do with the \$100 you gave me. Every time I am down town there's always this one particular homeless guy sitting somewhere. He's an older man and seems to be a good guy. Every time I see him I will stop and chat with him for a couple minutes. He has a very good sense of humor. He has some different signs that he holds up on cardboard. One of them is just a complete blank piece of cardboard with nothing written on it. Another says, “I'm pregnant, please help.” Another says, “Fugitive on the run, anything will help.” He says that at least a dozen different times when he's held up that sign he's had the cops called on him. - people actually believing he's a fugitive.”

I decided to take him to Wal-Mart on Thursday evening. I told him I was going to get him a few things he needed. He ended up getting a new back pack, a sweater, a couple t-shirts, some new markers to write some new funny signs (I suggested those) and then he got a few groceries. He seems very thankful after I bought him everything. He did ask shy I was doing it for him and I just told him

that he seemed like a good guy and I thought he deserved something good to happen for him. Mom, you were right – it was great to help him out. Thank you. I'm glad you gave me the chance to do something like this." Love, Jamie."

There's something about giving that enriches the person who gives. It builds these wonderful bridges. This is what Lucinda and her son Jamie, understood.

If Adam Hamilton hears what I'm going to next say, he might jump off of the projection screen and take my microphone away. But I'm going to say it. If you have just \$100 to give to the church this year I'd prefer you do what Lucinda did. Give that \$100 to your child (or to another caring, Christian young person) and ask that one to pass it on to someone who needs it. Tell them to write a story about what they did so you can share the experience too. I would also love to hear about it.

Because what God wants for God's followers is to define ourselves by the way we share his blessings.

I pray that our young people will grow to become generous people and that they will have a bigger, transformational life because they learned to share.

Life is a gift, after all, and everything we are, everything we have ultimately belongs to our awesome and amazing God.

PRAYER