

GOD



THE GIVER

Stewardship Narrative Series presented by TENS

Proper 22
Mark 10:2-16

Twenty years ago, when I was a high school freshman, one of America's most prominent preachers led a conference in my tiny hometown. The first night, I ran up to the evangelist, eagerly thrust out my hand, and said, "My name is Levi Harris, and I'm so excited to hear you speak!" Without looking up, the preacher nodded, muttered "uh-huh," and walked away to speak with local religious grandees about his fee. My town and I were beneath him, levying unwelcome taxes on his time and stature. He couldn't wait to get back to people and places that mattered.

His actions stand in stark contrast to Jesus' actions in today's Gospel. Jesus is a busy man too, on the road to Jerusalem and the Cross. He doesn't have much time.

But over the disciples' objections, Jesus takes a break from teaching, sits down, and focuses on being present with this band of little strangers. Where the disciples see a bunch of noisy, dirty, goofy kids making demands on Jesus' dwindling time and energy, Jesus sees an opportunity to give.

Time may be the most extravagant gift of all. We can always earn more money and buy more things, but we can't make more time. Time is a fixed commodity; once it is spent, it's gone forever. Even life itself is just a brief parenthetical carved tenuously out of the eons of eternity. That's why we shouldn't spend time on meaningless trifles: We don't have time to waste.

However, Jesus shows us that sharing time with others isn't wasteful. Stranger and friend, young and old, whole and infirm, rich and poor: people are worth our time. They're worth the effort it takes to make memories with them; to touch, serve, and bless them.

In fact, though science and experience teach us we can't stop time, sharing our time can bring us very, very close. Playing with children, say, or Christmas caroling at nursing homes, or serving food to the grateful hungry, or laughing with old friends, we may find ourselves transported again and again, suddenly, sublimely, to those "thin places" in which time stands still and, for fleeting moments, we're able to glimpse



eternity. And I promise you that every loving, grateful act is timeless, and every wave it casts will keep on rippling, across forever, to the very end of the universe.

Two decades later, I still remember the preacher who thought I wasn't worth his time. Meanwhile, I suspect the little children Jesus took up in his arms that day were still telling the tale of his selfless generosity for the rest of their lives.

Miserly or magnanimous: What will they say about us?

Reflection Questions:

What activities occupy most of your time? Are the activities tiring or life-giving?

How do you feel when someone important to you devotes time to you?

What does Jesus teach us about how we use our time?



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