



CANADIAN
BAPTISTS
of Ontario
and Quebec

SERMON SERIES
GUIDE



GENEROSITY

All of life. All we have. All we are.



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WELCOME TO GENEROSITY

Generosity begins with trusting that God is our generous host. Once we begin to trust:

Relationships deepen with God and others.

Gratitude clears the way to focus on the right thing.

Surrender ends the fight to hold on to everything.

Releasing everything to his purpose extends God's blessing to the whole world.

Generosity is a five-week campaign prepared to help your congregation (re)discover the joy of generosity. The campaign includes this leadership guide as well as a five-week sermon series, a corresponding small group study and plenty of resources. You can find everything in one place on our website at baptist.ca/stewardship.



WHAT TO EXPECT

In this Sermon Series Guide you will find the following elements to help you craft an engaging and transformative worship service.

Video: These short videos introduce the main theme for the worship service and can easily be shown with a projector and internet connection. If that isn't possible, we've included a transcript of each video. Each video can be accessed at baptist.ca/stewardship.

Sermon Texts: These are the main texts we've chosen to explore the theme and guide your sermon preparation.

Big Idea/Problem/Living in the Tension: This is where you'll find the main ideas for your sermon in a succinct paragraph. It also forms the introduction to the corresponding small group study.

Sermon Key Points: These points are included to guide you as you craft your sermon. They are organized to serve as a sermon outline but you are free to use them however you want. The research is referenced so that you can expand your study and check the sources. Note that the section "What does this look like for us this week?" is highly dependent on your context. Feel free to use our ideas as a springboard as you tailor them to your particular community.

Resources: This is the list of resources we used to study the key texts for the week.

Participation Idea: This is an idea to get your whole congregation involved in the service and engaged with the main theme.

Call to Worship: Use these on-theme calls to worship to help your congregation enter a time of worship, prayer, fellowship and learning.

Offering Moment: We encourage you to plan some extra time around your offering moments in this series. Here you'll find suggestions to help your congregation reflect on what it means to give. You can also use our offering moment guide to craft your own.

Song Suggestions: Here you'll find a mix of old and new songs that touch on the weekly themes.

A couple of pastoral notes:

- In order to talk honestly about generosity we have to speak honestly about scarcity. We all struggle with the lie of scarcity - the idea that God is holding out on us. But many of us also struggle with real scarcity caused by generations of sin at work in the world. Some of your congregants may be facing real scarcity in terms of economics, power and privilege. Sometimes this scarcity is obvious but often it is hidden. Be sensitive when framing your points to distinguish between scarcity caused by unjust systems, racism, sexism, poor environmental stewardship and crisis and the lie of scarcity that claims God is holding out on us in the midst of all of this. Scarcity is real for many. The lie is that God doesn't care and we're in it on our own.
- Be aware that many of you are preaching about generosity and scarcity from a place of privilege and power - whether you feel that way or not. Consider those in your congregation who are different from you - those who are the opposite gender, those who have a different ethnic heritage, those who live with differing physical ability and those in a different generation from you. Invite their input. Send them your transcript ahead of time and ask for their honest feedback and/or experiences with generosity and scarcity. You might consider having some of them share these experiences with the congregation during the series.

Enjoy this series! May the Spirit inspire joyful whole life generosity in your congregation over the next five weeks and into the coming year!

WEEK ONE: THE GENEROUS HOST

Video: Bible Project: *Generosity*

Sermon Texts: Genesis 2:4-25 (Creation and Fall), John 2:1-12 (Miracle at Cana)

Big idea: Creation is an expression of God's generous love. He is the host and we are the guests. We don't have to worry about whether or not there will be enough because God has abundantly provided for our needs.

Problem: It doesn't feel like there is enough of anything - time, money, love. Anxiety characterizes much of our life. Poverty is a reality for many people.

Living in the Tension: Our scarcity problem began in the garden with Adam and Eve. The serpent convinces them that God is not really a good and generous host and that they must take matters into their own hands - which they do. This gives birth to generations that cultivate inequality, jealousy, and injustice. The rest of scripture can be read as God's answer to this human condition of distrust and greed. Over the next five weeks you are invited to wrestle with the idea of God as a generous host, challenge your worldview and be shaped by the very words and ideas that shaped Jesus. The hope is that this will cultivate a joyful, deep, whole life generosity in us.

SERMON KEY POINTS

SETTING UP THE CONCEPT OF GOD AS A GENEROUS HOST: Genesis 2:4-25

A modern parable: "Imagine your friend invites you to a party. You arrive and there are lots of people, decorations, food and drink—there's enough for everyone. When you're hosted by someone that generous, you don't have to worry about your needs. You can enjoy yourself, focus on the people around you. That's what good hosts want for their guests. This is the picture of the world that we find in the Bible. Creation is an expression of God's generous love. He's the host and humans are his guests in a world of opportunity and abundance." (The Bible Project Generosity Script)



The significance of the headwaters (Gen 2:10-14): According to these verses, the Garden of Eden was situated at the headwaters (or source) of the four most important rivers of the ancient near east. Headwaters have long been recognized as sacred places because they are a source of life and flourishing. In ancient times the gods always lived at headwaters because the gods were the givers of life. So ancient kings, as the representatives of these gods would build their gorgeous palaces and vast adjoining gardens near headwaters. Everything the land needed for growth and food and life flowed straight from the gods, through the King's garden and out into the world. Here God is depicted as the most powerful ancient God and King who lives at the headwaters that nourish the entire earth. These verses are brimming with a sense of abundance and life. The Creation story tells us that everything humanity and creation needs to live and flourish on earth is already present and flows straight from God, the ultimate source of life. (Walton p. 166-170 and Waltke p. 85)

Expanding the Garden: Genesis Chapter 2 doesn't present us with a garden that is already cultivated and perfect. It paints a picture of a lush, raw, wild beauty. When God creates Adam and Eve he invites the humans to care for the garden and work in it. Notice that verse 10-14 also tell us that the rivers flowed out of Eden into the rest of the wild world where precious treasures were just waiting to be uncovered. It reminds us that Adam and Eve weren't supposed to stay in one place, but fill the world, expanding the garden as they went. They were to do this with confidence that as they ruled and served alongside God, they would uncover new things that pointed to God's glory and generosity. Humans were made to both enjoy and spread the abundance of God's generosity to every place on earth. (Provan, p. 68 and 69; Wright, p. 48-54, 223-224)

SETTING UP THE PROBLEM - IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE THERE IS ENOUGH: Genesis 3

Is God still a generous host? Perhaps God was once a generous host, but today there doesn't actually seem to be enough for everyone. We live in a world where there is great inequality and poverty - both materially and socially. We may be surrounded by people, but we feel deeply unknown and lonely. We are relatively rich in Canada, but our lives are characterized by anxiety and stress. There don't seem to be enough hours in a day. In fact it feels like we are giving too much. Is God asking for more than we have?

The serpent plants a sneaky seed (Gen 3:1): The first thing the serpent does is plant a seed of doubt in Eve's mind about the generosity of God. He asks Eve if God really told them not to eat from any tree in the garden. God in fact told them to freely eat from any tree in the garden except for one. Eve corrects the serpent but most of her response focusses on God's one prohibition. There must have been hundreds of trees in the garden! But the seed had been planted. The lie of scarcity entered the world. Eve's focus shifted from her abundance to her lack and the scene is set for a great catastrophe. (Provan p. 80)

The Fall as distrust in the generous host: One way to understand Adam and Eve's sin in eating the forbidden fruit is to see it as a lack of trust in their generous host. From the moment they took matters of provision into their own hands the whole system seems to unravel. Competition, struggle and violence enters the scene with Cain and Abel and grows exponentially from generation to generation. Lamech (Gen 4:19-24) epitomizes the evil that grows out of this distrust. He treats women like property, murders the vulnerable and boasts in war. In our world today, whether we have a lot or a little, we all still struggle with the lie of scarcity. This is the lie that says "Maybe God is holding out on you. Maybe he isn't such a generous host after all. Maybe you need to take care of you and your own first." (Birch p. 49)

Expanding the modern parable: Imagine yourself at that amazing party again - the one with the really good, generous host. Now imagine you come across a group of people holding all the food in one of the rooms. It's a weird thing to do at a party so you ask them about it. They tell you that there might not be enough food for everyone so they're trying to make sure their friends will have enough until the end of the party. As they tell you this a few more guests overhear. These guests overhear and hide the nearest chocolate fountain in another room. Before long the party has turned into a hostile battle for limited resources. The tables are knocked over and the rooms are barricaded. If this party goes on long enough, no one will remember that in the beginning it was an abundant feast with a generous host. In fact there is a good chance no one will recognize the host at all amidst the chaos. (The Bible Project Podcast: Generosity Episode 1)

HOW DO WE LIVE WITHIN THIS TENSION? John 2:1-11

John's Weddings: The Gospel writer John loved a good wedding story. His writing begins with a wedding feast in the Gospel of John and concludes with a wedding feast in the book of Revelation. For John there was no better metaphor or framework for the whole Biblical story. According to John we're all at a party and Jesus, the very image of our invisible and generous host, is taking care of us.

Hosting a wedding in Ancient Israel: Generous hospitality was at the core of ancient near eastern culture. A wedding would be celebrated amidst all the riches a family could shower on their community. The master of the feast was a friend of the family who took care of all the details so that everyone else could have a great time. He oversaw the waiters, functioned as the MC and most important of all, made sure everyone had enough to eat and drink. (ESV Global Study Bible notes and Freeman p. 513)

The significance of the wine: In the Old Testament, wine is a symbol of God's blessing, abundance and generosity. Wine was not just a luxury like it is today, it was also a key part of everyday life. Wine was used as medicine, as an important part of celebrations and even an important part of worship. When the prophets spoke about God coming to restore the world they said that an abundance of good wine would be one of the symbols or signs of this new age (check out Isaiah 25:6-8). (Kreglinger 11-36)

The promise and hope for us: According to the Gospel of John, Jesus' act of turning water into wine at a party was the first sign that he is the very same generous host that created the world. Not only that, but he is the generous host that will restore the world to health and wholeness so that everyone has more than enough. When we drink wine (or juice)

during communion, we are reminded that Jesus faced the ultimate scarcity - death - in order to bring us abundant life in his in-breaking Kingdom. We look back to his sacrifice and forward to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE FOR US THIS WEEK?

Identify the lie of scarcity in your own life. Whether we have a lot or a little in terms of material wealth and power we all struggle with the lie of scarcity. Ask yourself, “Where has the lie of scarcity crept into my life? Where am I struggling to trust that God is truly good or on my side?”

RESOURCES:

Birch, B.C., Brueggemann, W., Fretheim, T.E., Petersen, D.L., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. (2005). 2nd Ed., Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press

Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible*. North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

Kreglinger, G.H. (2016). *The Spirituality of Wine*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing and Co.:

Provan, I. (2016). *Discovering Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing and Co.

The Bible Project Generosity Resources
(<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/generosity/>) and
Generosity Video Script (<https://thebibleproject.com/other-resources/script-references/>)

The Bible Project Podcast: Generosity Episodes 1-5 (August 4, 2019 - Sept 1, 2019)

Waltke, B. K., & Fredricks, C. J. (2001). *Genesis: A commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Walton, J. H. (2001). *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Wright, C.J.H. (2010). *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

PARTICIPATION IDEA:

At the beginning of your sermon, have one piece of individually wrapped chocolate handed out to everyone. Instruct them to hold it but not eat it during the sermon because they will be asked to give it away later on (part of the challenge will be to keep it from melting!) Just before the conclusion of your sermon instruct them to give the chocolate to someone sitting nearby. This will result in a bit of laughter and chatting. Some of the chocolates will be melted. Someone may have eaten their chocolate before the instructions were given. Some may receive two chocolates by two different people and some may suddenly find they didn't receive one at all. One overly earnest person will try to ensure that everyone gets one by sneaking out to find more in the back somewhere. The more chatter, confusion and awkwardness the better. After a minute continue by concluding your



sermon. Remind them that God is a generous host. That at God's party there is always enough for everyone. Acknowledge that even though we know this, it can be hard to believe it. Point out that by not eating their chocolate right away some people lost it altogether when it melted. Some sad person didn't get one. Someone else got two. Dear Donna missed half the conclusion of the sermon by going off to look for more somewhere so that no one was left out. Life doesn't always seem like a party where everyone gets enough, and yet, we are called to trust that our generous host is still in charge, working alongside us to bring everyone into a place of abundance. At the very end, have plenty of chocolates handed out so that everyone gets another one (or two or three or seventeen!)

Another idea is to skip the chocolates and simply offer an abundant surprise at the end of the service. One pastor called up his local bakery and had their famous bagels delivered by the dozens during a service. As the smell of freshly baked bread filled the air the pastor encouraged everyone to fill up a bag or two on their way out.

Call to Worship: Responsive Reading from Psalm 104:1,10-15, 33, 35b.

Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.

He makes the springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.

He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

He makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for people to cultivate - bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts.

I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Praise the Lord, my Soul. Praise the Lord.

Offering Moment:

Our call to worship from Psalm 104 today reminded us of the rich abundance of God's creation. Verse 27 and 28 read "All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things." Our God is a good and faithful provider. We give generously because God has given generously to us.

Before we collect the offering, take a moment to close your eyes and take a few deep relaxing breaths. Let's do that together now and then I will pray. (Pause for a few breaths).

Creator, what a gift it is to be alive,
To take oxygen into our lungs.
Thank you for this simple reminder that our lives find
Their source in you,
The Breath of Life.
As we breathe in we say thank you.
As we breathe out we open our hands.
We give to you out of what you have given to us.
May it bring life as your Kingdom comes.
Amen.

Song Suggestions:

- All Creatures of our God and King (1225 & 1919) - St. Francis of Assisi and William Henry Draper
- This is my Father's World (1915) - Maltbie Davenport Babcock
- How Great Thou Art (1949) - Stuart K. Hine
- So Will I (2017) Hillsong United
- New Wine (2017) Hillsong



WEEK TWO: RELATIONSHIP

Video: *Relationship*

Big Idea: God's solution to humanity's struggle with scarcity was to give God's self. This is the greatest act of generosity! God comes to the struggling world first through Israel and then through Jesus and now, because of Jesus, through the Spirit-empowered church. Generosity begins in relationship with our generous God who made us in God's image.

Problem: Our relationship with God was wounded. We struggle to trust that God is fully on our side. So instead of trusting, receiving and giving, we take and boast.

Living in the Tension: Taking and boasting lead to heartache and suffering. God works in the midst of our pain to bring transformation and life and to gently show us that God alone is trustworthy and that all is gift. When we suffer from the scarcity induced by our broken systems, by evil and by our own sin, God continues to offer us God's self as gift to bring us back into abundance. God does this to the extent of coming to live with us in the very midst of our scarcity.

Sermon Texts: Genesis 12-13:2 (Abraham's faith and doubt), Matt 4:1-11 (Jesus in the wilderness)

SERMON KEY POINTS

GOD OFFERS TO BLESS THE WORLD BY BLESSING ABRAHAM

Blessing: Blessing is the central theme of God's first words to Abram in chapter 12. In fact blessing has been a central theme in the first 11 chapters of Genesis as well. Almost as soon as God begins to create, God begins to bless. Blessing in Genesis is about much more than spiritual realities. It is grounded and earthy. Scholar Chris Wright says "Blessing...at the beginning of our Bible, is constituted by fruitfulness, abundance and fullness on the one hand,

and by enjoying rest within creation in holy and harmonious relationship with our Creator God on the other.” In chapter 12 we are reminded that blessing is deeply set within relationship. God blesses humans so that humans can in turn bless other humans and bring glory to God. This is God’s answer to human fear and scarcity. Abram’s invitation into deeper relationship with God also invites him into a renewed relationship with the land, with family, with other nations and with the economic systems of his day (Wright, p 67 - 68).

Three horizons - individual, national, universal: God invites Abram to experience blessing on three levels. At an individual level Abram is invited to leave his father’s home and join God’s mission. Abram is then told that an entire nation will grow from him and Sarai’s offspring taking this blessing to a national level. Finally, God elevates this to a universal blessing by promising that all the families of the earth will be blessed through gifts God bestows on Abram and his family. (Waltke p 202)

Covenant: This blessing in Gen. 12:1-3 forms a covenant between God and Abram. The purpose of the covenant was to bring Abram, and through him everyone in the world, into relationship with God. The covenant revealed the character and nature of God to his chosen humans who in turn showed God’s character to all the other humans. God is a blessing God. A generous and welcoming host. God is trustworthy and just. (Walton p. ?) In Romans 4:16-17 Paul reminds the church that through Jesus the people of the church are the descendants of Abraham and inheritors of this commission. It is through the church that God will cause the world to flourish and heal (Wright p. 72).

ABRAHAM BELIEVES THE PROMISE

Abram goes: Abram’s response in verse 4 corresponds directly with God’s command in verse 1. God says “Go” and Abram “went”. From 12:4-9 we see Abram acting in great faith and obedience. The relationship between God and humans is on the mend for the first time since Noah. Through his actions we see that Abram believed that God was trustworthy.

Major Obstacles: Abram trusts God despite two very large obstacles. The first was that his wife Sarai was barren and

elderly making the birth of an heir impossible. The second was that the land God gave Abram was full of another powerful nation, the Canaanites. Abram still chose to believe in the reality of God’s promise.

Altars: As Abram journeys he sets up altars to worship God and to be in relationship with God. These piles of stone at sacred and strategic points along the way marked the advance of God’s promised blessing into the world. They were tangible signs of Abram’s faith and God’s new reality appearing here and there on the land itself.

ABRAHAM DOUBTS THE PROMISE

Abram stalls: In Gen. 12:10-13:1 things begin to go in a different direction, or rather, no direction. The story begins when Abram “went down” to Egypt and ends when he “went up” from Egypt. We don’t hear of any new altars being set up. Abram’s journey stalls and with it his trust in God. Feeling fearful and motivated by a sense of scarcity Abram comes up with a terrible scheme that results in his wife being taken into Pharaoh’s harem. Considering the fact that Sarai was to be the mother of Abram’s nation, this puts the promise of blessing into serious jeopardy. (Waltke p 206) Not to mention the fact that the enslavement of women points to the curse rather than the blessing.

Famine: The reason Abram takes a trip to Egypt is because he is experiencing a severe famine in his new land. In light of this his fear and sense of scarcity makes sense. Palestine was prone to droughts due to its reliance on rainfall and it was common for people to migrate to Egypt during these times. Egypt was supplied by the Nile river and set up to store food for such times. The question Abram was wrestling with is one that we can relate to. Where is God in times of real need?

Still blessed: The fact that we do not hear Abram asking God for help or hear God giving Abram guidance in this story signals a deterioration in their relationship. The famine was severe. Abram was afraid. He took matters into his own hands. As a result his family and this foreign nation experience the curse rather than the blessing. Nevertheless, despite things looking very bleak for a while, God intervenes. Egypt discovers the scheme and Abram and Sarai leave with great wealth. The advancement of



the blessing depends on a gracious and generous God, for whom there are no obstacles. God shows Abram that he is trustworthy in the midst of hardship both outside of Abram's control and of his own making.

JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO TRUST GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

Practicing Famine: Trust is hard, especially in times of genuine need and suffering. Abram struggled with it and so did the nation that came from him. When Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to fast for 40 days he was re-enacting his ancestors' difficult days of living in barren places where food and water is scarce. By fasting Jesus was practicing trust. Through this retreat of silence and no food Jesus was exercising the muscles he'd need to trust God when life threw its most difficult and scary challenges his way. In his life Jesus would be part of many great feasts and parties. He would know God's abundance and see Abram's blessing advance as people were healed and those from other nations were drawn in. But Jesus would also experience poverty, great loss, violence and betrayal. God's blessing does not guarantee us an easy ride of wealth and power in this life, but it does guarantee us a sense of abundance and safety that nothing or no-one in heaven or on earth can take away.

Deuteronomy: Jesus knew that it was going to be very tempting to take matters into his own hands in the wilderness. Sure enough, just as Abram was tempted, so was Jesus. But Jesus was prepared. He knew the story of Abram,

and Moses, and Jacob, and many others who had faced wilderness temptation. He knew that his shield against distrust was the image of God as the generous host. So he meditated on Deuteronomy chapters 6-8. In these chapters God speaks to Israel just before they step into the promised land of abundance and wealth. While they are still in the desert God reminds them of his love for them. Reminds them that God has provided for them in their times of great need. Reminds them that God is taking them towards abundance. Reminds them that all of it is gift. When Satan shows up to tempt him, Jesus is ready. Every response he makes comes out of this love letter in Deuteronomy from God to his people.

What does this look like for us this week?

Fasting: Fasting is a spiritual discipline Christians are called to practice on a regular basis. We don't fast to beat ourselves up or be better people. We fast to practice trusting in God. As we release our grip on the things or practices we have come to rely on for our sense of wellbeing, we face our great fear of scarcity. We feel the gnawing hunger. We are tempted to take matters into our own hands. We also identify with those who face scarcity without choice and we reach towards God's promise. Without fail God enters the space that fasting opens up in us. Perhaps God is inviting you to fast from something in order to deepen your relationship and trust in our generous provider.

Giving: Practicing generosity is another way that we can strengthen our trust in God. Giving requires sacrifice but it also builds a sense of connection, community and

abundance in our lives. To be able to give is a gift God gives absolutely everyone. It is an act of loving worship. As we imitate the generous host we see God's promise of blessing advance in the world like Abram's little altars popping up in a foreign land.

Breath prayers and Scripture: Henri Nouwen writes "Oh, if we could sit for just one half hour a day doing nothing except taking a simple word or phrase from the Bible and holding it in our heart and mind. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps 23:1 NRSV). Say it three times. We know it's not true, because we want many things. That is exactly why we're so nervous. But if we keep saying the truth, the real truth - "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" — and let that truth descend from our minds into our hearts, gradually those words will be written on the walls of our inner holy place." (Nouwen p. 29-30)

RESOURCES

Walton, J. H. (2001). *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Waltke, B. K., & Fredricks, C. J. (2001). *Genesis: a commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26 (Vol. 1B)*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Wright, C.J.H. (2010). *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Nouwen, Henri J.M. (2011). *A Spirituality of Living*. In Mogabgab, John S. (Ed.) *The Henri Nouwen Spirituality Series*. Nashville: Upper Room Books.

Participation Idea: Hand everyone a stone at the beginning of the service. At the end of your sermon tell the congregation that they will use their stones like Abram did when he built altars in the new land. In a moment you will invite them to lay their stone at the front of the church as a symbol of their trust in God's promise to take care of them and bless the earth through them. Ask each person first to hold the stone and think about their relationship with God. Where are they in their journey of trust? Are they facing a wilderness or a time of abundance today? It's okay to be honest. Remind them that as Jesus sat hungry and staring at rocks in the desert his first temptation was to turn a stone into bread. Where are they tempted to grab, clench and take control? What would it look like to resist that temptation? You may want

to read Deuteronomy 7:6-9 or another passage as a reminder of God's love and faithfulness while they hold onto their stones. Leave a time of silence and then invite them, when they are ready, to come up to the front and lay down their stone as an act of faith, trust and worship.

Call to Worship: Good morning! The words in Psalm 103 remind us of God's loving generosity towards us when we are feeling great and when we are feeling low. It speaks of God's blessing when we are wounded by the sin of others and even when we face the consequences of our own sin. Psalm 103 tells us that God is the King over all Kingdoms and powers of this world. As I read it for our call to worship this morning, hear it as an invitation to come just as you are into the presence of our loving, healing, forgiving, strong and good God. [Read all of Psalm 103 or read a portion of it ending with the verses 20-22]

Offering Moment: Have a member of your church leadership come and share a story about a time they felt God calling them to be generous, but struggled to trust. What happened and how did God demonstrate his faithfulness in that situation? What did this teach the leader about generosity? About God? Have the leader pray for the offering after sharing.

Song Suggestions:

- Be Still My Soul (1752) - Katharina Amalia Dorothea von Schlegel and Jean Sibelius
- Great is Thy Faithfulness (1923) - Thomas O. Chisholm and William Runyan
- Desert Song (2008) - Hillsong
- Lord I Need You (2011) - Matt Maher
- Reckless Love (2017) - Cory Asbury

WEEK THREE: GRATITUDE

Video: *Gratitude*

Big Idea: Gratitude defeats the lie of scarcity by re-shaping the way we see things. Gratitude acknowledges that God is the loving giver and we are the beloved recipients. It focuses on the “enough” and opens our eyes to the abundance of the in-breaking Kingdom.

Problem: We tend to take credit for the good stuff in our lives. The flip side of this is that we believe that our security and wellbeing depend entirely on us. This leads us to take, hoard and control rather than give, distribute and release.

Living in the Tension: It is often in the midst of our perceived scarcity, our stress and even our poverty that God demonstrates generosity to us. This may come in the form of provision and it may come in the form of an invitation to participate in what God is doing. As we learn to acknowledge these gifts and say “Thank you” we begin to cultivate a spirit of gratitude that leads to abundance and generosity.

Sermon Texts: Luke 1:26-56 (Mary’s invitation and song of gratitude)

SERMON KEY POINTS

MARY’S CONTEXT

Nazareth: The town of Nazareth didn’t have a great reputation in Israel. The people were looked down on for their lack of education and culture and their rough accent. Due to the high population of Gentiles in Nazareth the residents were also considered to be irreligious, immoral and prone to unrighteousness. The disciple Nathanael would famously ask, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Mary knew what it was like to be stereotyped and to be on the receiving end of prejudice. (Ungers Bible Dictionary “Nazareth”)

Rome: Israel was occupied and ruled by the Roman Empire. Mary’s people were taxed at a very high rate in or-

der to pay for the expanding empire and there was an atmosphere of tension and fear. Poverty was normal and Roman soldiers were the unpredictable and powerful authorities that walked the streets. Mary would have known what it was like not to feel safe in her own community.

Betrothal: Mary was in an arranged marriage with Joseph and was probably about 16 - 18. She was in the ‘betrothal’ phase of the marriage which is like our engagement but more serious. During this time the groom would provide gifts to the bride’s family and oaths would be taken. Sometimes a feast would be given and rings exchanged. But the bride and groom would still live separately until the marriage feast itself. (Ungers Bible Dictionary)

Women and infidelity: In ancient Israel, a woman’s infidelity during betrothal or marriage was cause for death. The penalty was up to the husband or husband-to-be. He could have her brought before the temple authorities and sentenced, he could divorce her or he could marry her. There was no consequence for male infidelity. (Ungers Bible Dictionary)





MARY'S SONG OF GRATITUDE AND PRAISE

A Familiar Song: Mary's words reflect the powerful words of Miriam after the Exodus (Ex 15:1-18, 21), of Deborah during war (Jdg 5:1-31), and of Hannah at the beginning of the King David story (1 Sam 2:1-10). Each song introduces a new phase of Israel's history but is told through the lens of a woman's life and struggle. Each song follows a similar format and contains similar themes and phrases. The songs became part of Israel's regular worship and it is likely that Mary would have grown up singing and praying them. (O'Day, Foster and Reid)

A humble song: A major theme in Mary's song is that God reverses fortunes. God lifts up the humble, or lowly, and God brings down those who are proud and trust in their own resources. The word often translated as "lowly" can be understood both as material poverty and those who suffer a lack of power. Mary believed that God was the source of her "fortune". According to Mary's theology, the truly wealthy were those who received their care and status from God and the truly poor were those who counted on themselves for their wellbeing. (Foster)

A confident song: Mary's song may epitomize humility, but it is also fiercely strong and confident. Though Mary acknowledged her humble status in the eyes of the world, she confidently acknowledged her status as blessed in the eyes of God. Despite the risk and danger involved in Mary's mission from God she trusted that God would continue to bless and protect her. "From now on generations will call me blessed," she prophesied with accuracy that is startling when we consider the cost of unwed pregnancy in her day (and even in ours!). Mary trusted in the faithfulness of Yahweh who "has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." (O'Day)

IMPACT OF MARY'S SONG

Political: Although difficult to prove, it is widely rumoured that Mary's song has been banned from public speech in three countries in recent history. It is believed to have been first banned from being sung in British Ruled India for fear that it would spark a revolution amongst the poor. In 1977 it apparently did spark a revolution when a group of Argentinian mothers began chanting the magnificat

as a protest against government conscription of children into the army. The Scripture verses were quickly made illegal to say out loud or post in a public place. Finally, it is rumoured to have been banned from public speech in Guatemala in the 1980s when it became a cornerstone text for liberation theology. (Connolly, Powell)

Bonhoeffer Quote: “The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings.... This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind.” (Bonhoeffer Advent sermon 1933)

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE FOR US THIS WEEK?

Our story forms our gratitude: Mary knew the story that she was a part of. She knew the stories of Miriam and Hannah and they prepared her for her own part in God’s mission. When God issues an invitation that turned her life upside-down she already knew she could trust in God’s upside-down ways. Mary was able to respond with gratitude and be generous with her life because she let Scripture form her trust in God. What stories are forming your life? How do you ensure that the Biblical story is your own?

We must practice gratitude over and over: Studies have shown that practicing gratitude on a daily basis can actually rewire our brains for greater resilience, health and joy. (Harvard Health Publishing). Mary’s song suggests to us that she regularly practiced gratitude as she meditated on the goodness of God. So many of the phrases she used were already a part of Israel’s worship. There are many ways that we too can practice gratitude: Journalling, naming five things we’re grateful for before bed, praying before meals, or hikes, or concerts, or other experiences that demonstrate God’s goodness to us. Or, like Mary, we can memorize parts of scripture or songs of praise and repeat them as prayers throughout our day.

Joy does not mean happy all the time: It is true that practicing gratitude cultivates joy in our lives. But being joyful people



does not mean being people who feel happy all the time. Theologian Gordon T. Smith reminds us that our joy is not complete until Jesus makes all things well, but, “our joy now in the midst of this deep fragmentation is a foretaste of what is yet to come; we live in a broken world, but our emotional focus is determined not by the fragmented world but by the reality that is yet to come.” (Smith, p. 157)

Gratitude is not blind to evil: “Mary’s prayer of praise, like many of the psalms, calls us to consider our true condition: God is God, and we are the creatures God formed out of earth. The nations are but nations, and even the power of a mighty army cannot save us. We all return to dust. And if we hope to rise in God’s new creation, where

love and justice will reign triumphant, our responsibility, here and now, is to reject the temptation to employ power and force and oppression against those weaker than ourselves.” (Norris, p. 99)

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Participation Idea: Communal prayer of Gratitude - Begin with a simple prayer of thanksgiving and then invite the congregation to join in by calling out what they are thankful for. This simple exercise never fails to transform the atmosphere for the remainder of the service. Gratitude - especially when practiced out-loud in community - is powerful.

Call to Worship:

Hear the words of Miriam and Moses after God delivered them from slavery in Egypt (as translated in the Message Ex. 15:1-2):

I'm singing my heart out to God—what a victory!
He pitched horse and rider into the sea.
God is my strength, God is my song,
and, yes! God is my salvation.
This is the kind of God I have
and I'm telling the world!
This is the God of my father—
I'm spreading the news far and wide!
Come let us worship and give thanks to our God.

Offering Moment: Have one of the church leaders come up and say thank you to the congregation for their giving. Share a story about the impact of the weekly giving. That may be a ministry that has benefited, or a practical need being met, or a service provided to the community. Finally, have the leader pray, giving thanks to God for a generous congregation and the opportunity to partner with God in mission.

Song Suggestions:

How Can I keep from Singing? (1869) Robert Lowry
Great are you Lord (2012) - David Leonard, Jason Ingram and Leslie Jordan
Way Maker (2016) - Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu
What a Beautiful Name (2016) - Hillsong

WEEK FOUR: SURRENDER AND TRUST

Video: *Surrender and Trust*

Big Idea: Jesus teaches us that we can surrender and trust ourselves to God because God knows what we need and will provide more than enough for us. He points to things in creation, like the birds and the flowers, to show that we do not have to worry.

Problem: It is difficult to trust Jesus' teaching in a world marked by environmental degradation and poverty. It can also be hard to trust Jesus when our own lives feel so overwhelming. It is hard to trust Jesus' words when God has disappointed us while blessing others.

Living in the Tension: Jesus himself lived in a context of poverty, oppression and great inequality yet his worldview was shaped by the Hebrew Scriptures and his deep relationship with the Father. What seems like naiveté or foolishness was actually the powerful truth at the core of the Gospel: that not even poverty, betrayal and death - the scarcity we fear most of all - can separate us from

the abundance of life that God offers us. Where evil and greed destroy, love always resurrects.

Sermon Texts: Matthew 6, Romans 8:31-39

Study Texts: Matthew 6, Romans 8:31-39

SERMON KEY POINTS

Setting up the context:

The Audience: Jesus is not speaking to the rich and powerful. He is talking to the crowds who were often poor and hungry. They were preoccupied with basic human needs of food, drink, and clothes. They were also those who lived under the powerful and often corrupt leadership of Rome and wealthy Jewish kings like Herod. For Jesus to say, "do not worry" to this particular community of the hungry, poor, and thirsty is quite remarkable.



The Sermon on the Mount: This passage falls towards the end of Jesus famous “Sermon on the Mount”. The sermon begins with the Beatitudes which set the context for everything that follows. Author Scot McKnight helps us understand what they mean: “The Beatitudes are normally misunderstood as a list of virtues. The Beatitudes, however, are not a virtue list: they are a list of the kinds of people in the society Jesus maps for his listeners. Those who are responding to his kingdom vision are the poor and the hungry, those who weep and those who are despised by the powerful — and those who are not responding are the rich, the well fed, the party-prone, and those who are approved by such powerful folks. No, this is not a virtue list but a socio-political statement: the work of God in Jesus and through the kingdom is to include the marginalized, to render judgment on the powerful, and to create around the marginalized (with Jesus at the center) an alternative society where things are (finally, by God) put to right. Here we come into a vision of the kingdom of God on the part of Jesus that is an extension of the Magnificat and the Benedictus and Jesus’ inaugural address.” (Scot McKnight)

THE INVITATION TO SURRENDER AND TRUST

Do not worry: The word “worry” is mentioned six times in this passage and forms the central topic of Jesus’ teaching here. Jesus directly addresses worry about food, drink clothing and the future. These were the key insecurities faced by the people he was speaking to. What might be the key worries Jesus would address in your congregation? What are some of the things that have come up in the previous weeks of this series?

The birds and the flowers: The object lessons at the core of Jesus’ teaching in this passage are from creation. They remind us that Jesus’ worldview was shaped by the Hebrew scriptures, like Psalm 104. Rather than seeing the natural world as a competition for limited resources, Jesus saw it as an outpouring of God’s generosity and goodness. The lesson is simple: If God provides for the birds and flowers how much more will God provide for you, his beloved image-bearers? We might be tempted to point out the dead birds and poisoned flowers and ask Jesus if we shouldn’t be just a bit worried. The original listeners may have eyed the Roman guards standing nearby and wondered the same thing. Jesus’ response was to lead a



path straight towards the feared Roman cross and show them that not even death could separate them from the love and life found in God. In fact, this death only served to advance and multiply the promise of blessing to the ends of the earth. (The Bible Project Podcast)

Preoccupied with the Kingdom: At the end of the passage, Jesus adds a new imperative in the positive. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” We are invited to be preoccupied with the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God and let God take care of the rest.

You are the Beloved: After Jesus rose and ascended into heaven his followers began to understand and live this teaching with new depth. The apostle Paul, who faced times of abundance and times of great suffering, wrote the following in his letter to the Romans: “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:31-32,38)

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE FOR US THIS WEEK?

Good news: At first glance this passage contains some of Jesus’ most challenging teaching. It is challenging if you are facing real scarcity and struggle and it is challenging if you find yourself in a position of abundance and power with lots to lose. But there is good news! Preacher Darrell Johnson translates the sermon on the mount phrase “blessed are those” as “You lucky bums!” Jesus isn’t calling us to be superhuman in this passage. Jesus is describing what it feels like to be a member of his in-breaking Kingdom. Kingdom residents are not characterized by worry. They are people of courage and peace. As we follow Jesus into this Kingdom reality with imperfect and often fearful steps we find the Spirit transforming our anxiety into peace and our fear into trust. (Johnson)

There’s something about creation: Jesus’ tells us that one of the antidotes to worrying is contemplating creation. Residents of his Kingdom see birds and flowers and are reminded deep in their hearts that there is nothing to fear. Science backs this up. Many studies have proven that regular interaction with the natural world decreases anxiety and increases wellbeing (Pearson and Craig). Maybe it’s time to take up birdwatching! Or maybe it’s time to look around and help those facing barriers to experience the life-giving effects of God’s creation. A Rocha is an amazing Christian organization that helps with exactly that. You can learn more here: <https://arocha.ca/where-we-work/ontario/cedar-haven-eco-centre/> For Christians this is also at the heart of our mandate to care for creation and steward it well. (Mustol)

Seek first the Kingdom: God is inviting you to be primarily on the lookout for his in-breaking Kingdom. Every day we are invited to participate in heaven coming to earth. This doesn’t mean that we give up our jobs to sit on our porch and wait. It means that in our work and in the mundane tasks of our day we practice keeping our eyes open to God’s action and presence. Jesus promises us that as we do this, we’ll begin to see God’s provision and generosity everywhere.

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Participation Idea: Invite your congregation to place their hands, palms down, on their laps. Have them close their eyes and bring to mind anything that is worrying them or that they are internally gripping. Once they have brought this thing (or multiple things) to mind, and when they are ready, invite them to turn their hands palm up releasing the thing they are holding on to, their worry and their fear to God. This is an act of surrender and trust. With their palms up invite them to receive the peace and love that God longs to pour out on them.

Call to Worship: Invite your congregation to a communal time of prayer as your call to worship. Begin with the phrase “God you are...” and have them speak out the end of the sentence. Finish with a paraphrase of Exodus 34:6 “Lord you are the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving our sins.” Amen.

Offering Moment: Giving is an act of surrender and trust. It is also an act of “seeking first the Kingdom”. Share some ‘Kingdom stories’ - ways that you have seen

the Kingdom coming in the midst of your church life together. Or open the floor and have the congregation share some brief stories of the way they have seen God at work in the community through your church. Remind them that we give to see God’s Kingdom come on earth, in our neighbourhoods and cities, just as it is in heaven. When we fix our eyes on this exciting vision - and when we name how it is unfolding - it’s amazing how much easier it is to surrender and trust.

Song Suggestions:

O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus (1875) S. Trevor Francis
It is Well With My Soul (1873) Horatio Gates Spafford
Hallelujah What a Saviour (1875) Philip Paul Bliss
In Christ Alone (2001) Keith Getty and Stuart Townend
My Lighthouse (2014) Chris Llewellyn and Gareth Gilkeson
What a Beautiful Name (2016) Hillsong





WEEK FIVE: BLESSING

Video: *Blessing*

Big Idea: In order to show everyone that there truly is enough God continues to offer God's self to the world through his people. That's us! As we enter into a deeper relationship of trust with God, as we practice gratitude and as we allow our worldview to be shaped by Jesus we collectively show the world what a good and generous host God is. The Spirit empowers us to live such whole, abundant and generous lives that everyone in the world will be clamouring to get in on this Kingdom party. Through us, the church, this will continue until absolutely everyone is around the table.

Problem: It doesn't always look like this is happening. Even if we follow Jesus with counter-cultural surrender our lives don't always appear attractive to the world.

Living in the Tension: Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God often looks unremarkable. It looks like a tiny mustard seed, or like some yeast in a batch of dough. It tends to flip the way we think about things upside-down. To the world it looks like absolute foolishness, but to those hungry for life who get a little taste, it all begins to make sense. The church is not the Kingdom of God, but we offer glimpses and tastes of the in-breaking Kingdom as we are drawn closer to God and partner with the Spirit. Though it may not always look like it, a revolution of blessing is quietly growing as we await Christ's return - and nothing can stop it from overtaking the whole world.

Sermon Texts: 2 Corinthians 8,9 Revelation 19:7-9; 21:1-4,22-27, 22:1-5

SERMON KEY POINTS

THE PARTY WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb: The great Christian hope for renewal, resurrection and peace is depicted by the apostle John as an extravagant wedding feast in the book of Revelation, chapters 19-22. It contrasts with chapter

18 which describes all that has gone wrong with the world through the metaphor of greedy and corrupt Babylon. As Babylon falls chapter 19 opens with a crowd roaring and singing in celebration. This is a party!

Great welcome and equality: Heaven and earth come together in the marriage of the Triune God and his bride, the church. Revelation 19:5 celebrates that both the “great and small” are there. 21:24 says that all the nations are present and their kings bring gifts. In 22:17 we hear, “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” When John, overcome by all of this, falls down at the feet of his angelic guide to worship the angel says “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” There is an amazing sense of welcome and equality amongst these party-goers. (Dawn p. 186)

Worship from suffering: Writer Marva Dawn points out that the only other place we find the phrase “rejoice and be glad” (Rev. 19:7) in the New Testament is in Matthew 5:12 - the end of the Beatitudes. Here Jesus uses it to describe the heavenly reward awaiting those who have suffered from following him. The cost of our surrender and trust and the long years in wilderness and famine will not be wasted. They will be transformed into the most beautiful praise. Whole life generosity always leads to abundant blessing which leads to abundant praise. (Dawn, p. 187)

Eden restored: Revelation 22 depicts a glorious city situated at the source of a life-giving river. We are immediately reminded that the garden of Eden was situated at a river’s source too (Gen 2:10)! The garden has been restored! Except that now it has become a city and the site of a great international party. In the midst of it all is the tree of life. The curse is lifted. The blessing now spreads across the earth. There is peace, healing, abundance and joy. This time everyone knows that there is enough for all. And the best part of all? God is there! With everyone! Together the whole earth celebrates our great and generous host. (Johnson, p. 369-379)

THE PARTY HAS ALREADY STARTED

Jesus’ Kingdom party: Jesus announced that, with his arrival, the party we are waiting for has already begun (see for example, Mark 1:14-15 or Luke 4:14-21). He described this as “the Kingdom of Heaven come near” and “the good news” or Gospel. Jesus’ is the image of the very same generous host who set up the lush garden of Eden, blessed Abram in order to bless the world and gave himself as a baby to the young woman who sang a song of gratitude. Our generous God has shown himself to us and invited us to co-host the party starting today. As we give generously we begin to enjoy the party of heaven here on earth.

Rich generosity and great joy: During a time of hardship for the church in Jerusalem, the apostle Paul encouraged his Gentile churches to give generously and sacrificially in order to help them out. Far from being a hardship, Paul pointed out that this was an opportunity to display the richness, abundance and “overflowing joy” of life in Christ. Paul’s appeal is dripping in language that sounds similar to the language of the party-goers in Rev. 19. Like the praise in that chapter, suffering and joy are intertwined as Paul says, “In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Cor. 8:1). In these words we find the secret and mystery of God’s in-breaking kingdom party: It may not always look or feel like it, but God’s promise of blessing continues to advance and nothing can stop it from overtaking the whole world. (The Bible Project Podcast, Episode 4.; Harris and Wilson p.15-37)

Interdependence and equality: In 2 Cor. 8:13-15 Paul clarifies that being generous isn’t about giving to the point of your own depletion so that “others are relieved while you are hard pressed.” Giving comes out of abundance. It reflects Jesus radical teaching about equality in the Kingdom of Heaven. It creates an interdependence amongst God’s people. As Canadians we are blessed with plenty compared to many in the world. Some of us are blessed with more than others in our church and neighbourhood. Paul encourages the relatively well-off Corinthian church to give out of their abundance and to be prepared to receive from others too. Sometimes we give in order to feel like we are important, good and necessary but this is not the kind of generosity that trust and surrender cultivates

in us. As Paul puts it “the goal is equality”. Sometimes whole life generosity looks like receiving from others who have less power and fewer resources than you.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE FOR US THIS WEEK?

Join the party! What would happen if you imagined yourself as the divinely appointed, generous “co-host” of your neighbourhood? Your workplace? What might “co-hosting” God’s abundant kingdom party look like for you this week? Here are some ideas for getting started:

- Get together with a few people and read some of Jesus’ statements about time and treasure and then ask yourself, “What next step might Christ be calling me to take?”
- Maybe you need to simplify and give away some of your clothes or books or kitchen utensils.
- Maybe Christ is inviting you to get control of your debt and finances so that you don’t need to be burdened by the stresses of money and so that you can be more generous. Christians Against Poverty offers a great, free, debt counselling course. Find out more here: <https://www.capcanada.org/>
- Maybe Christ is inviting you to consider how you can give 1-5% more of your income to your church. A helpful app for giving is Tithely. You can find out more here: <https://baptist.ca/stewardship/tithely/>
- A disciple of Jesus is one that hears the voice of Jesus and responds accordingly. It is easy to tune out the voice of Jesus when it comes to our time, talent and treasure. The more we listen for that voice and respond the more we will continue to hear Christ nudging us to live a life of blessing.

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The Bible Project Generosity Resources (<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/generosity/>) and Generosity Video Script (<https://thebibleproject.com/other-resources/script-references/>)

The Bible Project Podcast: Generosity Episodes 1-5 (August 4, 2019 - Sept 1, 2019)

Participation Idea: This is a great Sunday to finish off with a celebratory potluck! Make it fun! Do something to emphasize abundance. Maybe this providing a surprise element: endless popcorn from a popcorn machine, baked goods from the local bakery, a giant cake to go with ice-cream at the end or a candy bar. Or maybe the youth can take on the role of playing over-the-top attentive waiters and hosts ready with warm towels and toothpicks and any other ridiculous element they can dream up.

Another idea is to host a dessert auction after a simple community meal of pasta, chilli or soup. Have some of your congregation’s best bakers make some extraordinary cakes and desserts. Then have the youth (or anyone with a sense of humour and love for the limelight) auction the desserts off for a local cause. Maybe this is to support your youth group’s transportation costs to Avalanche or Blizzard. Or maybe it’s for a local initiative that your church supports. Be sure to invite any community members who don’t attend your church but might be interested to attend and participate!

Call to Worship:

Today we look forward to the hope of a new heaven and earth. Listen to the words of Isaiah as we prepare our hearts for worship (Isaiah 35:1-2,10 NIV)

The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.
...and those the Lord has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Offering Moment: Invite the congregation to dream with you for a bit during this offering moment. Put the question out to them: What are your wildest dreams for our community? For our church? What are you hoping for? If Jesus moved into our neighbourhood what would happen? If they get stuck help them out with some ideas. Remind them of your church's vision and some of the plans and ministries that are coming up on the horizon. Invite them to give as an act of faith and hope for what is coming.

Song Suggestions:

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty! (1826) Reginald Heber

To God Be the Glory (1875) Fanny Crosby

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing (1758) Robert Robinson

Build Your Kingdom Here (2011) - Chris Llewellyn and Gareth Gilkeson

The Lion and The Lamb





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