

Proper 14 C 2010
August 8, 2010
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A few months ago I rescued a horse that had been neglected. She had been pregnant and left out in a field all last winter with no shelter or blanket – and you must remember what a wild and unusually cold winter we had! So much of her energy had to go to the colt and just keeping warm, that by the time I saw her she was terribly, terribly thin. The vet said she needed to gain 200 pounds. Her hooves were overgrown, her coat was dull and her skin was infected. Despite all this, she had a lovely calm personality and was very willing to carry a rider on her back.

She was about 10 years old and had been ridden by young people since she was retired from trotting races 4 years ago.

I named her Splash because the first time I put her in with my other two horses, and they tried to push her around, she went straight to the 80 gallon water trough, put her front leg in, and splashed most of the water out all over her back.

It only took about a week of antibiotics for her coat and skin to heal, and after a month of good care and feeding she had gained much of the 200 pounds. Splash always whinnies when I carry out the hay and grain, and she tears into the food with incredible gusto. I have to hold onto the grain bucket or she will turn it over in her enthusiasm. I imagine that she always will react this way to food, no matter how long she is well cared for, because she still remembers what it was like to be hungry all the time, to never have enough.

This week I heard on NPR that 40 billionaires have pledged to give at least half of their wealth to charity. Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffet have taken the lead on this generous initiative to enrich the world.

"We need to support each other", said one of the donors.
"I look at this as replanting your garden
so that future generations will have a full bounty of crops."

Another said, "I have so much money I would never be able to use it all".

When it comes to money and possessions, I think that most of us fall in between these two extremes of scarcity and abundance:

- The extreme of never having enough – of always being hungry for more

And

- The extreme of having **so much** that you couldn't possibly use it all – and your only worry is how to give it away.

Jesus said to his disciples, *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourself that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

These words of Jesus come at the end of several parables about possessions. After warning about the dangers of covetousness and anxiety, Jesus promises us the freedom that God wants for us:

- the freedom to set our hearts on God
- the freedom to let go of anxiety about money and possessions
- the freedom to live in the abundance of the kingdom of God

Jesus promises us that we can find this freedom by practicing the art of generosity.

And we don't have to be billionaires in order to be generous. Surely many wealthy people are very generous. But some of the most generous people I have known have been people on the lower end of the economic scale. At my previous parish, one of the people who gave most generously of her resources was an elderly, retired school teacher who could no longer attend services because of her health.

When have you been surprised by someone else's generosity?

Sometimes it is my own kids who surprise me – other times it is someone I don't know – like the 40 billionaires who signed the generosity pledge recently.

Every time I witness an act of generosity, I am inspired to become more generous myself. Generosity is contagious.

When we live out of a spirit of abundance,
practicing the art of generous living,
we live in tune with the kingdom of God.

For God's love is not something that can be used up or hoarded.

God's love grows the more it is freely shared;
and
our gifts and talents grow the more we share them with others.

“ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ”