

Many years ago before anti-discrimination laws were in effect, Mrs. Rosenberg was stranded late one night at a fashionable resort on up north ~~one~~ that did not admit Jews. The desk clerk looked down at his book and said, "Sorry, no room. The hotel is full." The lady said, "But your sign outside says you have vacancies." The desk clerk stammered and then said curtly, "You know that we do not admit Jews. Please try the other side of town." Mrs. Rosenberg stiffened noticeably and said, "I'll have you know, I have converted to your religion." The desk clerk said, "Oh, yeah, well, well... let me give you a little test. How was Jesus born?" "He was born to a virgin named Mary in a little town called Bethlehem," she says. "Very good," replies the clerk. "Tell me more." "He was born in a manger." "That's right," responds the hotel clerk. "And why was he born in a manger?" "Because," Mrs. Rosenberg answers sharply, "the clerk behind the hotel desk wouldn't give a Jewish lady a room for the night! Any more questions?" It's good to grow big enough to put away childish things and bigotry, which at times however has been and is worse than childish.

The Word speaks today about giving others what they want, or need because you are gracious, generous, compassionate. At some point in our lives, we are to turn from receiving to giving. This is a huge shift. We now become the generous ones. Becoming gracious toward others, generous in giving is to show the kindness of God, as David did toward his best friend's son. The word in Hebrew is more closely translated "grace," as in "that I may show grace for Jonathon's sake." The history between David and Jonathon was that of a very strong friendship, and at one point Jonathon, Saul's son and the one who should have been king after Saul if things had worked out right, asked David to promise him that he would not kill him when David came to reign. You see, this was quite likely since it was the practice that when a new king took over he exterminated all those from the former regime so that nobody could lead a revolt. Jonathon is asking David not to do this. David promises, but Jonathon doesn't survive. In fact, as we find out, the only person to survive from Saul's blood line is a son of Jonathon—Mephibosheth, a man with a physical disability. Mephibosheth literally means, "exterminator of shame." The shame of his grandfather Saul would be exterminated when David kept his word to Jonathan. So the question for David is, do I keep my promise or not?

At the church in Memphis where I was called into the ministry I wanted to be a teacher. This large church took teaching so seriously that I had to take a year long course on how to teach. When I finished they gave me my graduating assignment. For one Sunday I had to teach kindergartners about this story of Mephibosheth. So I got Sherril's green bathrobe, put it on backwards, put on a pair of sandals and a gold paper crown at which point I lept into the room of little children. They had never seen me before so they believed I was king David to tell the story of Mephibosheth.

It's like the young fellow in Sunday school whose teacher asked the class if they would give \$1,000,000 to the missionaries. "Yes!" they all screamed!! "Would you give \$1,000?" Again they shouted, "Yes!" "How about \$100?" "Oh, Yes we would!" they all agreed!! "Would you give just a dollar to the missionaries?" she asked. They exclaimed "Yes!" just as before except for Johnny. "Johnny," the teacher said as she noticed the boy

clutching his pocket, "why didn't you say 'Yes' this time?" "Well," he stammered, "I have a dollar." When it's our turn to give, it's a different story. We ought to show the commitment to promises. Accept the joyful burden of being gracious and generous. Believe that you have something to give. Let your kindness give comfort even when unexpected by others. As scripture says, "Be kind to one another" Eph. 4:32 and "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all." Gal. 6:10

Growing up isn't just a physical process. Growing up is a spiritual process in which we become better at showing the kindness of God to our family, friends, colleagues, neighbors and strangers.

This may seem like asking a lot, especially since our role model is David and he only had to do it once it appears, and this was because he made a promise that he was obliged to keep, at least for his own conscience before God. Then again we don't have to bring a complete stranger into our home, feed him to his dying day, and take care of all his needs. I frequently saw my parents bring in people off the streets, feed them a meal, give them some clothes and a little money. What David did to the extreme for one, we will instead do for the many but with much less for each. What I want you to see is that we are that special teacher who stuck around after school to tutor students who were having trouble in a difficult subject. We are the kind neighbor who spent time with you showing you how to fix a car engine. You are the one who invites the new student over to your table and lets them start making friends with your friends. If we want to get better, we've got to become bigger, you know, become a bigger person by God's grace. A couple of ways of being gracious and generous is by complimenting people whenever possible; avoid sarcasm even when at first is mistaken for humor; sarcasm come from the Greek word sarc which means flesh and sarcasm is tearing at the flesh. Then always listen well before speaking. It helps to know fully what the other person is talking about before responding.

Of course, God wants us each to become better but that is only a means to the divine end which is to help others find and believe in God the Holy Spirit. There can be no greater gift than to be the source for someone else's faith. I have ask a person to get alone with God, then ask God to speak and write down what comes to mind. It is terrifying to them so they have not yet done it. Inspire others by your extravagant kindness and let God shine through your life. Show people what they are missing by not taking time to listen to God.

About 30 years ago a boy named Tony was born blind. However, when he was about seven years old, his doctor read in The New England Journal of Medicine of a new surgical procedure that showed some promise for correcting his particular eye problem. A young surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston had developed it and so the local doctor and the surgeon began communicating. The boy's full medical record was sent and in time a decision was made to try the surgery. Tony had a favorite teddy bear which he kept with him at all times. This teddy bear had begun to show signs of wear. One eye was missing; one ear was chewed off; and the stuffing was oozing out through several holes. Tony's mother had offered to buy him a new bear, but he didn't want a new one. So, the old one went with him to Boston and remained close through all the x-rays,

tests and consultations. In fact, the boy and his teddy bear were not separated until the anesthesia was applied for the surgery itself.

When the surgery was completed, Tony was heavily bandaged and had to remain still for a number of days. But each day the surgeon was in and out of the room to encourage him. Finally the day came for removing the bandages. For the first time in seven years Tony could see. Though his vision was blurred at first, it gradually clarified and for the first time Tony could look into the faces of his parents. Before long it was time for Tony to be discharged and go home. On that final morning, the surgeon signed the necessary discharge papers and he gave Tony a big hug and said, "Listen, I own stock in you. I expect to get letters from you regularly. Do you understand?" Then Tony did something totally unexpected. He said to his surgeon friend, "I want you to have this," and he handed him his teddy bear. The surgeon's first impulse was to say, "Oh no, I can't take that." But something stopped him. With a flash of sensitive genius, the surgeon understood what Tony was trying to do. He wanted to give his dear surgeon-friend the most precious gift at his disposal, his teddy bear. The wise surgeon accepted the teddy bear with a hug and a thank you, assuring Tony that he would take mighty good care of his friend.

For over 10 years that teddy bear sat in a glass case on the 10th floor of Massachusetts General Hospital—~~one~~ eye missing, one ear half chewed off, and stuffing oozing out of several holes. In front of the teddy bear was the surgeon's card and just beneath his name he had written this caption: "This is the highest fee I have ever received for professional services rendered." A little boy had given the most precious item he had, out of a love-filled heart. (Gregory A.W. Green, "All That Glitters")

It doesn't have to be gold. A big person is generous in spirit because like David you want to show the kindness of God. And it doesn't really matter the age; some people are and will always be bigger and more generous than people twice their age, heck, ten times their age. It's simply that when you believe that God is good and gracious and has poured out his blessings on you and your cup runs over and you want to be perfect like God in heaven is perfect, and you know that the merciful will receive mercy and the pure in heart will see God, and you seek to do the Lord's will rather than follow your own, well then it doesn't matter how old or young you are—because God's spirit rests upon you. And this makes all the difference in your life. Get committed to creating people who believe because they met you. Be an even bigger person.

A man visited a woman he knew to be in great financial need. He visited with a generous gift to help her with her expenses. He knocked at the door. She heard the knock, panicked and hid so no one would know she was there. The next weekend he told her about his visit. She said, "I heard you knock, but I did not realize it was you. I thought it was my landlord collecting the rent I could not pay!" Let that sink in for a moment. The man came desiring to give, but she mistook him for someone coming to take. So often God is mistaken as one exacting payment from people, when the fact is that he is the one giving gifts to people. If we hide from God's givers we will not have much to give either. Receive as well as give. The give as you have received.

Whatever your level of generosity is, double it. I am not talking about money either, unless that is an area around which God is calling forth from you greater commitment. Whatever your level of insecurity is, cut it in half. Give and be gracious in the ways that are your ways and don't make no never mind about it. Don't be worried if you aren't Moses or David or Mother Teresa. Be concerned if you aren't being the Bill or Robert or Susan you're supposed to be. As scripture says, "Everyone shall give as he (or she) is able." So don't hesitate to be gracious and don't wait for a better time to be generous. For God's kindness is ours to show to others because faith in God is ours to grow in others to make us all better and bigger.