

SERMON TEXT: Luke 12:22-31

SERMON TITLE: God the Giver

I want to begin by sharing a portion of an essay with written by Betty King. Her piece is entitled *Blessings Great and Small: Here in the Arizona desert where shades of browns, grays, blacks and muted greens at first appear to dominate the landscape, I live and expand my appreciation for God's canvas.*

Just today before day relinquished its light, on the horizon where the mountains loomed in the distance, God painted a sunset, its beauty taking my breath away. Wispy, swept clouds, delicately brushed, completed the Master Pieces. . . .

I am reminded too of springtime when the mountains burst forth in the brightness of sunshine as they are enveloped by wild flowers that have been sprinkled there not by accident or by the hands of man but by God and his glory...

*Today, unlike so many yesterdays that have skipped by unnoticed, I paused to reflect on a gift so often unopened, by we who are given greatness beyond measure by God the giver of all gifts great and small. I stopped, accepting this wonder of wonders and asked that my eyes be opened to minute blessings sent to me daily. (King, Betty. *Blessings Great and Small.*)*

O that our eyes might be opened to see the multitude of our blessings both great and small and to recognize God, the giver of all gifts--and what a generous giver God is.

The scriptures make this abundantly clear. God gives: creation, life, Spirit, Christ, church. God gives!

And God gives freely and generously, to meet even our most basic needs. Jesus said: *Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! . . . Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed*

like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you.

My brothers and sisters, have our eyes been opened to see the multitude of our blessings both great and small? Have we recognized that God is indeed the giver of all gifts? Well, obviously we have. Isn't that at least a part of why we're here this morning?

But now for the tough question: To what extent do we truly trust God, this gracious and generous giver, to meet our needs? Back in September of 1981, *The Ladies Home Journal* asked its readers: *In whom do you trust?* Newsman Walter Cronkite received 40% of the vote. Pope John Paul received 26% of the vote. Billy Graham received 6% of the vote. God received 3% of the vote. (*Ladies Home Journal*, Sept., 1981)

Well, apparently we find it hard just to trust God—much less to trust God to meet our needs. Jesus had us all pegged when he said of his disciples: *O you of little faith.*

And have you noticed? There are consequences when we fail to trust God. Anxiety and fear result. Oswald Chambers once said that all our fret and worry is caused by calculating without God. (Inrig, Gary. *The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant*. Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1991, p. 105)

Dr. Karl Menninger once asked one of his wealthy patients, “What on earth are you going to do with all that money?” The patient replied, “Just worry about it, I suppose!” Dr. Menninger went on, “Well, do you get that much pleasure out of worrying about it?” “No,” responded the patient, “but I get such terror when I think of giving some of it to somebody.” (Coffin, William. *Sermons from Riverside*, October 20, 1985)

This kind of anxiety is a pervasive problem in our culture. The Mayo Clinic claims that 80-85% of its total caseload is due directly to worry and anxiety. One leading physician has

stated that, in his opinion, 70% of all medical patients could cure themselves if they only got rid of their worries and fears. (Simpson, Craig. *Don't Worry About Anything*.)

We are an anxious people. And we're not immune from anxiety even in the church. We say that we trust God with our very lives, but then we hedge our bets and work desperately to secure our own lives. We worry about giving too much while, at the same time, following Jesus who gave everything—even his own life—for others.

But Jesus calls us to a deeper faith. He taught us how to trust. He said to his disciples: *Don't worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear! . . . For it is the nations of the world that strive after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

Let me show you what this kind of trust looks like. Richard Foster tells this story about himself in his book *Money, Sex and Power*. Foster writes: *During my senior year in high school I was invited to go on a summer mission venture among the Eskimo people of northern Alaska. Over the months I grew in my conviction that this was God's will for my life, yet I had no funds to make it a reality. Both my parents were seriously and chronically ill, and all the family's money had gone to pay medical bills.*

In April I went on a weekend retreat with the other team members to make further plans for the trip....On my return home I discovered a letter in the mail with a thirty-dollar check. The letter was from someone who knew nothing of my summer hopes, but the note read simply, "For your expenses this summer" It was a beautiful experience to watch over the ensuing months God's provision for every need for the trip.

But the story does not end there. When I returned home [from Alaska], my hopes for college were dim. All the money I had painstakingly saved through high school had gone for

hospital care for my parents. Now the summer had been used, not to earn money, but to minister among the Eskimo people. A bit sad but still confident...I applied for and was offered a job working for an insurance company. But before I could begin work, a series of events occurred that I could never have anticipated and for which I never had asked.

*One Sunday, one week before fall college classes were to begin, I spoke in my home church on the experiences of the summer. After the service a couple in the congregation took me to their home for lunch and during the course of the afternoon inquired into my college plans. Within a few days this couple had formed a support group that helped me financially through four years of college and three years of graduate school. God had taken people and their sanctified use of money to teach me trust. And as is characteristic of the ways of God, it was above all I could ask or think. (Foster, Richard. *Money, Sex and Power: The Challenge of a Disciplined Life*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985.)*

My brothers and sisters, isn't it amazing how God provides? God provided for Richard Foster through the gifts of generous friends. And God provides for us to meet our every need. The resources are available. And the distribution of these resources is a matter of generosity and of justice for which we are accountable to God. And finally, it's a matter of living in faith and without fear—the fear of giving too much or of having too little.

Now for the challenge: Consecration Sunday is one week from today. So over the course of this week as we pray about the resources we will give in 2008 for our church's ministry, I think it's important to remember the multitude of our blessings both great and small. God is a gracious and generous giver who provides for our every need. What is there to fear? And what does gratitude and God's Spirit living within us compel us to give in response?

