

You did well, recover.

So I kind of wanted to dance, but I knew that was not a good idea. So.

Sitting across from the offering box, Jesus was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions.

One poor widow came up and put in two small coins, a measly 2 cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, the truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together.

All the others gave what they'll never miss. She gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford.

She gave her all.

Nancy was a very simple woman. She was extremely poor. She had limited intelligence, and she couldn't hear thunder.

But she had one of the sweetest hearts I've ever seen. She was part of the church where I was previously for 20 years. And our worship was simple. We were Church of Christ, so we're acapella. We didn't have instruments.

We just sang. And our voices blended together most of the time in a beautiful way to praise the Lord. I would describe Nancy's ability to sing, as the psalmist says, joyful noise. Nancy made a joyful noise to the Lord when she sang. And because there were no instruments to hide the singing, you could hear her.

And sometimes when the rest of us would stop, she would keep going because she couldn't hear.

And it was kind of funny, it was kind of sad, and it was kind of beautiful all mixed together. Someone would say, nancy, Nancy. And she would stop. I don't remember what it was for, but we were planning a special contribution for something that we were doing. And it was going to be a relatively large contribution, thousands and thousands of dollars.

And so we planned it, prayed about it, promoted it, and we were getting ready to do it. There was a lady that took Nancy every week to the grocery store. And Nancy, because of her limited resources, would get the exact same things every week, just the bare essentials to live. And on the week before this large contribution to church, the woman took Nancy to the grocery store, and Nancy was getting her a few things. And the woman noticed that Nancy did not get some things.

And so she said to Nancy, nancy, don't you want to get this, this, and

this? She said, no, I'm not going to get those this week because I want to give more money to church. What she gave probably amounted to maybe \$5, which really, in the large scheme of what we were trying to do, really meant nothing. But something tells me that her gift was way more significant than anybody else's. She gave extravagantly what she could not afford.

She gave her all. A few years later, Nancy died, and I doubt she even had money to pay for this little simple graveside service that we did. And only, I don't know, just a few, very few people showed up. Nancy had very little earthly influence, but I believe her generous heart allowed her to lay up treasures in heaven, where she received a welcome way beyond her and our imagination.

It was Christmas Eve, 1942.

I was 15 years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there wasn't enough money to buy the rifle I wanted so badly.

We finished chores early that night on Christmas Eve. I figured Daddy wanted a little extra time to read from the Bible with us. And after supper, I stretched out in front of the fireplace, still feeling sorry for myself, when Daddy suddenly got up, bundled up, and went back outside. I couldn't imagine why, because we'd already done everything. But I didn't think too much about it because I was too busy feeling sorry for myself.

A few minutes later, Daddy came back in. He looked at me and said, come on, Matt, bundle up. Good. It's cold. I was irritated.

Not only was I not getting the rifle now he was dragging me back out into the cold for who knows what. But Daddy didn't like talk back and didn't like complaining. So I got up, pulled on my boots and coat. As I stepped outside, Mommy gave me a strange smile. Something was up outside.

My heart sank even more. The workhorse team was hitched to the big sled, the one used for heavy loads. Daddy climbed up on the seat with the reins, and I climbed in beside him. We drove to the woodshed, hopped down, and he said, we'll put on the high sideboards tonight. The high ones.

That meant a big job. Then Daddy went inside the woodshed and came out with an armful of wood. Clearly we were getting ready to load the sled full. So I asked daddy, what are we doing, son? Have you been by Mrs. Jensen's place lately?

The widow?

She lived two miles down the road and was left with three small

children when her husband died. I said, yeah, why? And Daddy said, well, I rode by there today, and little Jakey was out digging through their wood pile, looking for anything that would burn. They're out of wood, Matt. They're out of wood.

That was all he said. And we kept loading until the sled was piled as high as it could go. And then he went into the smokehouse. Daddy took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and came back with A sack of flour and another small sack.

What's in that sack? I asked. Shoes, he said. Jakey might as well have been barefooted, his shoes were so full of holes. And I got the children some candy.

Wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy. We rode in silence toward the Jensen place. I tried to make sense of it. We didn't have much ourselves. We had wood, yes, but not a lot.

We had meat and flour, but money, not much at all. Why wasn't Mrs. Jensen Someone else's responsibility?

We came in behind her house and unloaded the wood quietly. Then we knocked on the door. A timid voice said, who is it? Lucas Miles, ma'. Am.

And my son, Matt. Mrs. Jensen opened the door, wrapped in a blanket. Her children were huddled under another blanket in front of a tiny fire that barely warmed the room. Daddy set the flower on the table. I put the meat beside it.

Then he handed her the sack with the shoes. She lifted each pair slowly. One for her, one for each child. Good shoes, lasting shoes. Her lower lip trembled.

Tears filled her eyes. She tried to speak, but couldn't. We brought you a load of wood, too, daddy said. Then he looked at me. Matt, go in and bring some wood in.

Enough to last for a while. Let's get that fire going right.

I wasn't the same boy when I stepped outside. A lump filled my throat. Tears blurred my eyes. In my mind, I kept seeing those children and their mother, cold, hungry and grateful beyond words. As I brought in the wood, a warmth spread through me, a joy I'd never known.

I had given it Christmas before, but never in a way that mattered so much. Soon a real fire was blazing. The children giggled when Daddy handed them their candy. Mrs. Jensen wore a smile I doubt she'd worn in a long time. God bless you, she whispered.

We prayed the Lord would send one of his angels. A lump rose in my throat again. An angel. I never thought of Daddy like that, but now I wondered. Daddy insisted each one try on their shoes.

Amazingly, they all fit. Maybe that's how it works when you're doing the Lord's business. Before we left, Daddy hugged each child. They clung to him. They missed their own father, and I realized how grateful I was to still have mine.

At the door, Daddy said, the missus wanted me to invite you and the children for Christmas dinner tomorrow. We'll pick you up at 11. Mrs. Jensen nodded. I don't have to say, may the Lord bless you. I know he will.

On the sled ride home, I felt warm all over. After a while, Daddy said, Matt, I want you to know something. Your mother and I have been saving all year to buy you that rifle. We almost had enough. Then yesterday, a man paid back money he owed me from years ago.

Your mom and I were so excited, we thought, now we can get that rifle. And I was headed to town this morning to buy it. But on the way, I saw little Jakey digging in the wood pile with his feet exposed. And I knew what I had to do. Son, I spent the money on those shoes and a little candy.

I hope you understand. Oh, I understood. I understood. The rifle didn't matter anymore. Daddy had given me something better.

The look on Mrs. Jensen's face, the joy of her children. And the kind of Christmas I would remember for the rest of my life. That night, Daddy didn't just give them a Christmas. He gave me the best Christmas of my life.

Remember this.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

As it is written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever. Now, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. And you will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

The service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but it's also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. So Paul speaks these words to the Corinthian Church.

They're underperforming. They're underperforming in their generosity. And Paul's saying, listen, come on. It just reminds them, you can't outgive God. You just can't outgive God.

And. And your generosity is a reflection of who he is. There will always be enough, because God is unlimited. And so our generosity at church is a reflection of our heart, and it's deeply rooted in the good news of Jesus. God so loved us that he gave us, as a gift, salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

In 2nd Corinthians 8, Paul says this about generosity and giving. So I'm not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich for your sake, he became poor so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

So when you look at Nancy, when you look at Matt and his father, and when you look at the widow that caught Jesus attention, there's a thread that runs through all their stories, and it's this real generosity does not start with abundance. It starts with a surrendered heart to God. The poor widow, Nancy, Matt, and his father all gave beautiful gifts. Beautiful because they reflect the life of Jesus. He gave Himself all of Himself, extravagantly, willingly, sacrificially, joyfully.

And Paul says, thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. And that is the gift we remember now as we prepare to take communion. Communion is a time to remember.

And so today, as you hold the bread and hold the cup, remember this. Jesus became poor so that we could become rich in grace. He gave everything so that we could receive everything. He gave his life so that we could have life. And maybe the most generous thing that we can do in return is simply this.

To give him our gratitude, to give him our trust, to surrender our lives, to keep our hearts, our minds, and our hands open. So let's receive this indescribable gift. Let me pray. God, thank you for the power of story, both in Scripture and in lives that we know today. Just remind us yet again of your generosity that's really beyond

comprehension.

And what you ask of us is so small in so many ways, and yet we are so stingy at times and so protective of things that don't really matter. So please, open our hearts, open our minds, open our hands as we commune this morning and think about the gift that you gave us, the gift of salvation. It was very, very costly, very expensive. Cost Jesus his life. We thank you for that.

We thank you for the bread which reminds us of his body and the juice which reminds us of his blood. And we proclaim this until he comes again. And we're reminded of the resurrection and that we have in this life. Your presence. And your promise of everything being okay in the end.

And so may we find in that peace, joy and confidence. Thank you in the name of Jesus.

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