

transforming generosity

Deciding to Live and Love as Jesus Did

NOVEMBER 4, 2018

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Every morning before 5 a.m., my great aunt Gladys rises to bake bread for the small island of Green Turtle Cay in the Bahamas. She's been doing this six days a week for some 50 years. She shapes loaves in a small bake house behind her home and makes enough coconut bread, cinnamon raisin, and white sandwich loaves to sell at the store near the ferry's dock. While the loaves rest during the first rising, Aunt Gladys goes off to Bible Study. When she returns, the loaves are prepped for the second rise and finally baked, bagged, and sent off to be sold. Aunt Gladys has put her children through school, supported missionary needs around the globe, and will tell you without prompting that she has never wanted for anything. When I think of sacrificial love and sacrificial giving, her strong hands kneading pounds of dough before sunrise come to mind.

The scripture lessons for today prompt me to ask the question: What is the relationship between love and sacrifice? In one instance we have the widowed and vulnerable Ruth sacrificing any kind of security that might be remaining among her own people in a time of famine choosing instead to embrace a new faith and make a new life by casting her lot with the widowed and vulnerable Naomi. In the lesson from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is tested again by the scribes to see if he has the right understanding of the first and greatest commandment. Jesus correctly offers the ritual prayer that is reckoned as more important than any burnt offerings and sacrifices. "Hear O Israel, you shall love the Lord your God..." and not only that, one must love neighbor as oneself. Jesus makes clear that love is greater than the sacrifices offered ritually in the temple but he, as love incarnate, will also be offered up for the reconciliation of the world.

Any sacrifice I'm called to make seems to pale in comparison to these scriptures. To speak of sacrificial love, sacrificial giving, and self-offering is to expose the complicated relationships we have with our money, material resources, and other people. And yet, we are called to have the commandment to love God with all we have and to love our neighbor as much—or more—than we love ourselves written in our hearts so that our entire lives become the offering. Giving and living sacrificially become less a choice than a daily decision to live as Jesus lived and love as Jesus loved.

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For reflection ...

- ❖ Sacrifice isn't always just about loss. Can you name an instance in your life when you made a sacrifice that was life-giving?
- ❖ What prayers of thanksgiving might you offer for those who have made extraordinary sacrifices for you?
- ❖ What might you need to let go of or release to make the daily decision to walk in the ways of Jesus?

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