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My name is Jane O'Leary. I'm grateful to have been asked to come and spend Sunday morning at St. Andrew's. I have been here before on several occasions in one or other of my roles:

- I am a deacon of the diocese. I am Ed Scott's counterpart in another parish.
- That parish happens to be Church of the Guardian Angel, where you all have been generous, active partners for many years.
- I am Executive Director of Bridges to Housing Stability, a non-profit serving Howard County – solving homelessness with housing. I've been here before to tell you about Bridges' services to reduce and prevent homelessness in this county. St. Andrew's has participated in Bridges' Chili Cook-off in the past three years – and hopefully again this year.
- Because I have these two separate roles (Guardian Angel and Bridges) that both intersect with St. Andrew's, I always feel like I confuse you.

When Dina contacted me to come as guest preacher, she told me that the parish is engaged in thinking about giving and gifts. She didn't specifically say this, but I thought this was connected to the theme of stewardship, often the focus of churches at this time of the year. Stewardship is about (1) acknowledging and caring for the gifts we have been given, and (2) using them, giving them generously, for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In both the roles I spoke of, St. Andrew's has been extraordinarily generous. So maybe there's nothing new I can say to you on this subject, but let's give it a try.

Let's talk first about all we have been given. The time of Thanksgiving will be upon us soon, an occasion for taking inventory. It is overwhelming what we have been given – various gifts given in different measure to each of us: life, health, family, work, relationships, food, intellect, personal qualities, time, all that we need for our sustenance and comfort, faith, hope, love. Misfortune or mistakes may sabotage what becomes of our gifts, but we are all given gifts in great measure. Today's reading from the Book of Job inventories the excessive gifts that God gave Job: large quantities of livestock, which was a measure of wealth in those days, riches, a large family and a long life. The gifts God has given me are different ones, but just as overwhelming when I truly count them.

Now let's talk about giving our gifts generously for the coming of the Kingdom. God has been so generous to us. But we can have a wide range of responses.

- Thank you, Lord. Now what I have is mine to use as I please.
- Gifts?? No – I've earned everything I have.
- I may not have enough so I must keep everything to be secure.
- The more I share the gifts I've been given, the more I'll receive.
- Look – something happens when you give things away.

Responses change with maturity. As I thought about this I realized that I can measure the maturation of my faith by my responses to generosity.

True story: Like many young people, I stepped away from organized religion when I was given a choice. I abandoned it as irrelevant. The church where I grew up had served me fine as a child, and I didn't need it when I was no

longer a child. But when I had small children I knew I'd better get back to church for them – they would be needing what the church had for children. So I shopped around and when I re-entered a church as an adult, I still had my child's perspective about church: I went to worship and got my children in Vacation Bible School. But after a while my adult-eyes saw something I had never seen before. This was a small rural parish where neighbors were true neighbors to each other. When someone lost their job, people gave them money. When a farmer had an injury, some other farmers brought in his hay and tended his animals. When someone had property damage, they came together, giving time and materials, to make repairs. They were quiet and very earnest and humble about it. They took care of each other with no expectations, but they had to believe that they would be taken care of too. They said this is what Christians do. I thought Christians went to church, baked for the bazaar and put a few dollars in the collection plate – that was what my child-eyes had seen. This was different, and was over the top. But I grew to want what they had. And I saw that I couldn't have it unless I entered into their practice of generosity.

There are some old sayings about this: Love isn't love until you give it away. Isn't it true – that it is when we give of our selves and our gifts that we are transformed by grace? When we give ourselves in marriage or in ordination, or when we give our lives to parenting, or to caring for our aging parents or our neighbor in need, or when we give our time to a cause, or when my stepdaughter gave her brother a kidney... we may start out giving but we end up transformed by our own generosity. I see St. Andrew's folks having that experience when they come to Guardian Angel to give us Thanksgiving dinner or Super Bowl Saturday, especially those who come from behind the serving table to mix and share. The

folks from Guardian Angel desire to experience the grace of generous giving too, and I've talked to Ed and Dina about a project where they can come here and do something for you.

Here's another old saying: Give til it hurts. That's not it. Give til you get past the hurt and into the sheer blessing. God's generosity is our model. When we are generous with what we have been given, maybe more generous than we think we can afford to be, we receive a grace, a spiritual maturity that cannot be had by any other means. Pretty soon we are modeling God's generosity – on our way to the coming of the Kingdom.

I learned this from our generous God but also from a generous mother. When I spoke at her memorial service I tried to explain that the woman who gave her life to raise seven kids – short on money but long on commitment and sacrifice – she taught those children generosity that would come back to her in care when she needed it, and would be demonstrated to inspire the next generation, and on it goes. Generosity transforms individuals, but has the power to change the world. What if we all lived as Christians as defined by the folks in that small church?

I used the word sacrifice; this is the appropriate response to God's generosity to us. Sacrifice, again, sounds like it hurts, but Jesus showed us on the cross that it is where life starts, not where it ends.

We will soon come to the Offertory where we lay the table and prepare to celebrate Jesus's sacrifice. At Church of the Guardian Angel, once we set the vessels, the bread and wine on the table, once we receive the collection plate, our material offering, we have a ritual in which we acknowledge the gifts God has

given us, and pledge to use them generously as God would have us. It goes like this:

- Make a Funnel with your hand and use it to tap your chest – “God has placed gifts in all of us, and we receive them. And we offer them for God’s use.” We place those gifts on the table with the other symbols of sacrifice, saying “All things come of you, O Lord, and of your own have we given you.” -- The very definition of stewardship.

Another gift that God gives us is opportunity. The folks in my little church showed me that one person’s need is another’s opportunity. We listen and wait with our generosity poised. Jesus shows us that in today’s gospel. He is walking along with a crowd, surely with plenty to occupy his time and attention. But the voice of Bartemeaus calls out. People tell him to shut up. Wouldn’t it be easy not to hear him, or to walk past toward more important things, but this is Jesus’s opportunity to be generous with his gift of healing.

Where will my opportunity for generosity arise today? Or tomorrow?
Where is Bartimaeus asking for a moment of my time and my mercy?

God has showered each of us with gifts, and we respond with deep gratitude but that’s not enough to bring on the Kingdom. During the Prayers of the People, listen for the final bidding where we give thanks for the many gifts God has given us, and we ask God to, “Inspire us to turn our gratitude into generosity.” Turn our gratitude into generosity – that is the key.

AMEN