

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2025

Preparing the Way with Gratitude

The Rev. Shannon Kelly

*O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;
for their steadfast love endures for ever.*

—Psalm 107:1

Advent is a time of preparation and our reading today is a call to just that. A call to let go of the past and lean toward a future that is yet unseen. John the Baptist, a prophet and truth-teller, is calling people to “Prepare the way of the Lord.” How does one prepare for the coming of Christ? We prepare by readying our hearts, souls, and minds to receive Christ and in this act, we are opening ourselves to new possibilities, new thinking, new living.

I find gratitude to be an extremely useful tool in preparing myself for anything because it reminds me of what I have, the experiences that shape me, and the love that surrounds me. Each day, at the end of the day, I write down three things for which I am grateful. (Sometimes a few more if I can’t narrow it down to only three.) They can be simple things like dinner and games with my family, finishing a project, or watching the sunset as I walk my dog. Or they can be big things like when a loved one reaches a goal, a new job, a birth, a wedding, or adoption. Truth be told, there are also days when I struggle to come up with one, let alone three, and on these days when I dig deep to find what seem like small and insignificant things to be thankful for, I realize that no matter how bad my day, there are always at least three things that made my life better. And when I do that, it completely reframes the day. I also have discovered that there is a close link between how grateful I am and how generous with others I am able to be. It is in giving gratitude for the day that is past that I’m able to more fully prepare and embrace the next day, being more generous both with myself and with others.



Monday, December 8, 2025

Generosity and Gratitude

In practicing gratitude, we find those things that we truly love and those things that sustain us.

—Shannon Kelly

Shannon Kelly introduced us to the relationship between generosity and gratitude, a connection we will explore in depth as our focus for this week. We will provide specific prompts each day this week to help you follow Shannon’s invitation to bring to mind, and perhaps write down, three things that you are grateful for that day.

One way that generosity and gratitude are similar is that, ideally, they are both attitudes that we cultivate, not just specific actions. When we describe someone as a generous or grateful person, we are speaking of more than the good deeds they have done. We are speaking of a mindset they have, a way they have of seeing and being in the world.

When parents encourage children to share with others, they hope that through such actions, their children will grow up to be people with generous hearts, and that generosity will become a core value for them. Similarly, when we practice gratitude regularly, we are cultivating a way of seeing that recognizes blessing and gift, even in ordinary moments.

Gratitude and generosity feed each other. The more grateful we become, the more generous we tend to be. And the more generous we are, the more reasons we find to be grateful. This creates a beautiful cycle of blessing that enriches both our own lives and the lives of others.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three people or experiences from your childhood that you are grateful for because they modeled the core value of generosity.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

A Spirit of Giving

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

—2 Corinthians 9:7

Money is often a topic that many people find difficult to discuss. One person who did not find money hard to talk about was Jesus. He often taught about this topic, reminding us that where our treasure is, there also will be our heart (Matthew 6:21).

The apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy that “The love of money is the root of all evil.” Note that he did not say that money is the root of all evil. Money is neutral. What we do with money and what kind of attachment we have to it can be a faithful expression of Jesus’ teachings—or not.

At its heart, when we share our money with others, we express our deepest values. To give financially says that we believe in what we are giving to. When we give to strangers, to someone who is struggling, to our church, to a friend or family member in need, to a community effort, or to a cause we are passionate about, we express our care and our desire to help others thrive. We are saying we believe in them and we are expressing our love and God’s love through our giving.

As the verse at the top of this reflection reminds us, we want our giving to be motivated by joy and by our love both for God and our neighbor. God values a sincere and cheerful giver more than one motivated by guilt or duty. Financial generosity is one way we practice generosity—making thoughtful, intentional decisions about how we organize and use our resources.

Daily Gratitude Practice: As an expression of gratitude related to financial generosity, list three experiences where you have had the honor to either give or receive generosity in the form of money.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Grateful for Generosity in Times of Challenge

Look for the helpers. There's always someone helping.

—Fred Rogers

Life inevitably brings challenges, losses, and difficult seasons. During these times, we often discover dimensions of human generosity that we never could have imagined. It is remarkable how crisis and hardship can bring out the best in people, inspiring acts of kindness and generosity that help to restore our faith in humanity.

Consider how communities respond to natural disasters. Neighbors who barely know each other become lifelines for one another. Strangers travel great distances to help with relief efforts. Churches, organizations, and individuals donate time, money, and resources to help those in need. In the midst of destruction and loss, we witness the beautiful resilience of human generosity.

The same pattern appears in personal crises. When someone faces a serious medical diagnosis, friends and family often rally in amazing ways. Meals are prepared, children are cared for, rides are provided, and emotional support is offered. These acts of generosity become sources of deep gratitude that can sustain us through our darkest hours.

Being grateful for generosity received during challenging times doesn't mean we are thankful for the difficulties themselves. Instead, we are grateful for the ways that people show up for us when we need them most. This gratitude often inspires us to be more generous when others face their own challenges.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three people or experiences that showed you generosity during a difficult time in your life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Generous Communities

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

—1 Corinthians 12:27

Churches have a unique role in teaching generosity. Not only do they teach what Jesus taught, but when they practice this generosity in how they care for one another and in their outreach to the community, they become living models for all who are watching. Churches also have the opportunity to amplify the good they do because through community, they can accomplish good beyond what any one person can do.

When I (Scott) was serving as pastor of a congregation, several individual members were volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. Once they realized this, they got together and came up with the idea of getting our whole congregation involved. Eventually, over several years, we raised all the money and volunteers needed to build several houses.

What's possible when a church community works together can include meal programs, blood drives, diaper banks, clothing drives, day programs for memory care or unsheltered people, hosting 12-Step groups, and organizing service trips.

As the body of Christ, churches have a unique capacity to both teach and model generosity. When a community of faith works together, their collective generosity can have an impact far beyond what any individual could accomplish alone. Community generosity demonstrates how we can pool our resources and energy to tackle challenges that require sustained effort and resilience.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three experiences of a church or community practicing generosity that you have either participated in or been inspired by.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Friday, December 12, 2025

The Generosity of Strangers

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

—Hebrews 13:2

Some of the most surprising and moving experiences of generosity come from complete strangers. Perhaps someone stopped to help you change a flat tire, or a person tracked you down to return your lost wallet with nothing missing. Maybe you received an anonymous gift that came at exactly the right time, or someone offered you kindness when you were feeling lost or alone.

These encounters with generous strangers often stay with us for years because they remind us that goodness exists in the world in ways we don't always expect. They restore our faith in our global community, reminding us that we are all connected in the human family.

The writer of Hebrews suggests that when we encounter strangers, we might actually be encountering angels—divine messengers who come to us in human form. This passage reminds us of the sacred potential in every encounter with someone we don't know.

This truth also invites us to consider how we might be generous strangers to others. Every day we have opportunities to offer kindness to people we don't know and may never see again. A smile, a helping hand, a patient response when someone is struggling—these small acts of generosity can have profound impacts on others' lives. Being generous to strangers is atypical in a world that teaches us to be suspicious of people we don't know, yet it reflects the radical hospitality that Jesus modeled.

Daily Gratitude Practice: List three experiences where you benefited from the generosity of strangers, or when you had the opportunity to be a generous stranger toward someone else.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Saturday, December 13, 2025

Grateful for the Simple Things

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'Tis
the gift to come down where we ought to be.*

—Joseph Brackett, *Simple Gifts*

The Shakers were a Christian sect known for their simple ways of living, as captured in the familiar song *Simple Gifts*, written in 1848 by Shaker elder Joseph Brackett.

These opening lines mention the word *gift* three times. If simplicity is a gift, then it implies that there must be a giver. Although not explicitly stated in this song, the giver is God.

This song makes me think of all the simple gifts I have received in my life. I am blessed to enjoy the simple gifts of clean water, clean air, food on my table, and a place to sleep indoors each night. There are also the gifts of public spaces that I can enjoy—places others have created and maintained for all to enjoy, such as libraries, beaches, parks, trails, faith communities, and museums.

We can add the simple, sometimes barely noticed offerings of friends, families, and strangers—a door held open, a get-well card or message, a word of encouragement, a friendly pat on the back, or a meal delivered.

Life is full of simple gifts of generosity once we pause to notice. Often the most meaningful experiences of generosity are not the grand gestures but the small, everyday acts of kindness that make life beautiful. Gratitude for simple things requires intention in a world that constantly promotes bigger, better, more expensive, and more impressive. Yet these simple gifts often nourish our soul in ways that elaborate gifts cannot.

Weekly Integration: Looking back over this week's reflections and gratitude practices, which experiences of generosity touched you most deeply? How has focusing on gratitude this week influenced your own desire and capacity to be more generous?
