

Sermon :: 20-Sept-2026
Proper 20, Year A

“ ‘I am generous’ ”

It was almost forty years ago now ... toward the beginning of a lifetime of travel that would, eventually, take me all over the world ... and yet those few days in Sydney have never, ever left me.

Back in 1987, after my sophomore year of college, the Glee Club went on tour to Oceania: Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia and Tahiti. (We were supposed to go to Fiji, too, but they decided to have a coup!) Six full, rich weeks of singing, sight-seeing and home stays. And yet, the memory that shines most vividly are the days we spent in Sydney, Australia. Four or five of us were hosted by a kind American alum and his wife who'd lived Down Under for many years. They'd never had any children, and they'd signed up to host as many of us as they could.

They *showered* us with food and drink ... gave us the run of their *home* ... took us *everywhere* ... showed and treated us to *everything* ... and then, on the Fourth of July—our last full day with them—took us to the swanky American Club for a veritable feast. Then, on the way out of the club, they bought each of us an expensive club necktie so we'd always remember the wonderful week we'd spent with them in Sydney.¹ We all protested that they'd already done *enough*—that this was *too much*. But they *insisted* ... and as they presented us the ties, Bob said these last few days had been among the very happiest of his whole life ... and his wife's eyes were filled with tears. We were *bowled over* by their *generosity*. I had never experienced anything like its *abundance* ... or *unreasonableness*; and I have never, *ever* forgotten it.

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This is what we hear today about *God's* generosity, too, isn't it? That it's both *abundant* and *unreasonable*. To the Israelites, just out of captivity in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness, we hear God say that they need not worry or complain, for God will provide them abundant food for their journey; and indeed, for the next forty years, God will pour down manna like morning dew: enough for everyone to eat their fill that day ... and a *double* portion to tide them through the sabbath.² And in the parable of the laborers Jesus tells today, we're confronted by the (sometimes discomfiting) truth that *human* notions of '*fairness*' and '*worth*' and '*proportionality*' play no part in the calculus of *God's* love, which doesn't *conform* to *human* reason: In Christ, God has but one thing—which is *everything*—to give us: eternal union with the Triune God ... and *no one* receives any '*more*' or any '*less*' than anyone *else*. There is nothing we can do, in God's eyes, to *earn* any *more* or *deserve* any *less*. God's generosity toward us is both *abundant* and *unreasonable*.

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We're now in the second week of our stewardship campaign for 2027 ... the season we ask every parishioner to prayerfully consider, discern and then commit to the amount of money that they'll dedicate to All Souls', next year, to support the mission and ministries of this parish. And this year,

¹ I kept it for more than 35 years. Over the decades I don't recall many occasions for wearing it, but I did remember them each time I spotted it hanging there on my tie rack. I finally let go of it when I did a big pre-seminary 'wardrobe purge': Soon there'd be something *else* around my neck, most days!

² But God's generosity is to be trusted, not taken advantage of. Any excess portions the Israelites took—more than they needed for a particular day—spoiled and rotted, turning to something like worms (Exod 16:19-20).

recognizing *both* the abundance of resources we've *already been* blessed with—for God's generosity is *abundant* ... *and* the plenitude of opportunities that *lie ahead* of us—for God's generosity is also *unreasonable* ... we've chosen as our theme ROOM TO GROW: How, through the financial commitments we make to All Souls', we can both *respond* to God's *abundance* ... and, in daring to *dream*, *unlock* its *potential* in ways that may surprise us—may even seem *unreasonable* to us ... as we seek to GROW in *service* ... GROW in the *Holy Spirit* ... GROW in *witness* to our *community* ... and, as we take up today, GROW in *numbers*.

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Now, *numerical* GROWTH—seeking more members to fill our rolls—may seem like a kind of 'secular' or 'earthly' aspiration ... something less 'spiritual' and more 'green eyeshade,' as they used to say. And admittedly, there *is* a pragmatic—and, frankly, even existential—aspect to this vision. You need only look around any Sunday morning to see that while we're truly *blessed* to have many families with school-age children among us ... the great *majority* of our members have been making their way around the sun for more than six or seven or eight *decades* now. Indeed, perhaps the single most telling data point from the parish survey we did this spring was that *seventy-six percent* of the respondents were age 60 or higher ... and *none* was 40 or lower. While we will *always* be able to rely upon God's *generosity* ... it's *also* incumbent upon *us* to seek, *in* faith and *with* Christ, to bend the somewhat ominous-looking curve of our life-expectancy as a parish!

Therefore, we're using this year's ROOM TO GROW campaign to unofficially kick off our quest to call an associate rector. We're planning to build this new position—both cash compensation and housing—into our 2027 budget ... in the hopes that this new priest would arrive here next summer. And in our ROOM TO GROW campaign, we're consciously *challenging* ourselves, as a parish, to start making the financial commitments necessary to make this vision a *reality*.

To be sure, *all* the ways we may GROW as a parish ... in spirit and in service ... can help us GROW *numerically*, too. But this *particular* dream ... this *specific* vision ... of a second priest is, to some degree, the 'hinge' on which turn many of our *other* aspirations for GROWTH:

- Our associate rector's *principal* role would be ministering to and with children, youth and their families: serving both those who are *already here* ... and also attracting *new* families who are seeking a source—a *grounding*—of community, stability, respite, renewal and hope in their busy, burdened lives.
 - > The PrayGround and Children's Chapel are *wonderful*, and neither they nor Karissa are going *anywhere*. But think of how much *more* we could offer ... provide ... explore ... with a *second priest*: ¶a deeper, more structured *Christian education program*—and for a wider age-group—on Sundays ... ¶midweek *family nights*, with supper and activities for all age groups ... ¶increased opportunities for *fellowship, renewal* and *service*, like retreats and mission trips and service projects, not to mention fun outings ... ¶an intentional *family ministry*, with both activities here at church and devotions for use at at-home, across the various seasons of the *church year* and the various seasons of *families' lives* ... ¶*collaboration* with other local churches and *across* the *diocese*, to 'widen the circle' and create still more friendships.
 - > The possibilities are *endless*, and, for *sure*, we will dialogue with our *current* All Souls' families about which would be most *meaningful*—and also *do-able*—for *them*. But how *inspiring*—how *exciting*—it is to ponder a staff member whose *first* thoughts were always of the children, youth and families in our *midst* ... *and* in our *neighborhood*. *Think*

of how we could *GROW!*

- But our new associate rector would not be *only* a children, youth and family minister! Many of you have told us, this last year, how you'd really like to see more *small groups* here at All Souls': opportunities for six or eight or twelve people to come together to share *stories ... support* one another ... *learn* and *discuss* ... work on *projects* ... or simply enjoy *time* together. ¶ *Some* groups based on common *interests* and *ideas* ... and *some* groups for *everyone*; ¶ *some* groups for people of a *specific age* ... and *some* groups for *all ages*; ¶ *some* groups meeting on *weekdays* ... and *some* groups in the *evening* or on *weekends*; ¶ *some* groups gathering *here* ... and *some* groups in *homes* or at places to *serve others*.
> Again, the *possibilities* are *myriad*. What we *need* is a dedicated staff person to help form and nurture them ... and this would be *another* aspect of our associate rector's role. *Think* of how we could *GROW!*
- And the benefits of a new associate rector would extend beyond simply offering more programming. ¶ *I love* preaching and teaching and liturgy, and, to be sure, I'd continue to be *primarily* responsible for all these things. But how *energizing* ... how *broadening* ... how *hope-widening* ... it would be to have *another* voice, *another* perspective, *another* lifetime-of-stories-and-experiences *also* feeding the spirit of All Souls! ¶ And a new associate would bring with them their own passions and interests: Maybe they'd be an avid outdoorsperson ... or passionate for social justice ... or deeply into jazz or yoga or pottery or science fiction. *Their* interests and inclinations would lead *us* in new directions, *too*. ¶ And finally, I hope having a new associate rector would, at last, give us the capacity³ to make deeper, more meaningful connections across our *community*: with our unhoused neighbors in *Ocean Beach* ... with our military neighbors at *MCRD* and the *Navy Yard* ... our school-aged neighbors at *Silver Gate* and *Loma Portal*; *Dana* and *Cabrillo*; *Sunset Cliffs*, *Correia* and *Dewey*. *Think* of how we could *GROW!*

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Sometimes, I know, it's a temptation to look around at *what's* here—and *who's* here—and think this is the hand we've been *dealt* ... the '*fate*' of our *church*—of the *whole* Church ... and we just need to '*ride it out*.' But, my friends, God's *generosity* is both *abundant* and *unreasonable*, and God offers us capacious ROOM TO GROW if we'll but *dream* a little *bigger* ... *dare* a little more *boldly* ... *commit* a little *more*: If, in a word, we'll '*match*' the abundance and unreasonableness of *God's* generosity in how *hopefully* we *vision* and how *confidently* we *plan*.

And so, I am asking you, as you consider your pledge for 2027, to imagine an All Souls' *alive* with *children* ... *humming* with *youth* ... *brimming* with *small groups*: a place *families* and *neighbors* from

³ *I.e.*, might free up some of *my* time, in addition to dedicating some of their *own* time.

all across Point Loma call “home,” one way or another. For the ROOM TO GROW God has so generously given us *is abundant* and *unreasonable* ... and all *we* need to do is *seize* it!

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