

*Fearless Generosity Witnessed at
Spirit of Grace Worship November 2014*

November 2017

With his 'Greeter' button on his suit lapel, Jim Burke was happily greeting folks as they came to worship one Sunday in mid-November 2014. He's a regular greeter whether it's his role that particular Sunday or not! He often playfully joked with me (Pastor Rita) about one thing or another related to preaching & I playfully joked back that he better be ready, because he was preaching today. Well, this one Sunday in November, 2014 Jim did preach the most amazing sermon on fearless generosity. It all started at . . .

Worship at 11:15am at the South Campus on Sunday, November 10, which began as you would expect – prelude followed by welcome and announcements, etc. During the reading of the lessons, uncommon & unexpected activity began in the sanctuary. . .

Sharon Burke noticed her husband, Jim, began acting differently – she quickly realized he was passing out. Deacon Darlene Weikel saw this and from across the sanctuary quickly came to his side along with another worshipper, Cindy Heder. They grabbed him under the arms and the knees and laid him on the floor. Each of them being CPR trained quickly responded, even providing a chest compression. Nurse Patty Miller, who was the reader, quickly stopped reading the lesson and came to Jim's side and began assessing his vitals. Sharon immediately called 911. It began to ripple across the sanctuary that something was happening. Debbie Bryant, our musician, instantly began playing calm, soothing, gentle hymns as Pastor Rita led the congregation in prayer.

A new rhythm set in: the ongoing continuity of hymn-after-hymn; joined by both stunned and supportive church family who pulled together in prayer for Jim and Sharon; there were updates on how Jim was doing as his pulse fluctuated from good to threaded. Chairs were moved preparing for paramedics to come in the side door. Everyone stayed calm and a peace came into our midst. There was an undeniable holy experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Shortly the paramedics arrived and began to assess Jim's condition. Soon they brought in the backboard and lifted him onto it. Jim let out two moans. Sharon leaned over and asked him if he was ok. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out his offering envelop which he put in her hand before the paramedics carried him to the waiting ambulance.

Powerful. Meaningful. Jim lived out fearless generosity in the midst of his own health uncertainty. Led by faith, he made sure his offering of thanksgiving and love was given to God, like he had always done – only this time, it was his final act of worship to the Lord he dearly love. This was his faith in action and it was clear to us all that he was also preaching *fearless generosity*.

If you knew Jim Burke, previous deacon for SoG, you knew how much he was a man of faith. His faith made a difference in many people's lives, including his wife, Sharon. This weekend, Sharon will share her faith and how she *Lives Generously*.

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21

Blessed to Be a Blessing!

Live Generously,

SoG 2017 Stewardship Team,

Sharon Burke, Stephen Minister & Volunteer Project Coordinator

Elaine Waldrup, Council

Pr. Rita Gardner Tweed, Lead Pastor, Spirit of Grace





God's

ECONOMIC DELIVERY SYSTEM

Mike Slaughter

One of my favorite contemporary theologians is Bono of U2 fame. Bono is unapologetic about his commitment to Jesus Christ wherever he goes. Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, Illinois, sat down with Bono a few years ago for a conversation about faith. Bono pointed out during their dialogue that 2,003 Scripture passages pertain to the poor, the largest quantity next to those Scriptures dealing with personal redemption and salvation. Bono proclaimed that “the main thrust of the Scriptures is to meet Christ through working with the poor and disadvantaged.” He referenced Matthew 25, the only part of the Gospels in which Jesus described Judgment Day. I have always referred to that as the “final exam” passage. To pass that final, we had better belong on the side of those

who clothed the naked, fed the hungry, and visited the prisoner.

Bono next asked a great question: “Why have we amassed all this wealth and power if we cannot go to the aid of our sisters and brothers? . . . Love thy neighbor is not advice; it’s a command.” He followed up with two more excellent questions: “Can an accident of longitude and latitude really decide whether you live or whether you die? In the global community—in the globalized world, can you say . . . because that’s happening over there, it’s not really my concern? Well, you can’t if you’re a Christian.”¹

I was born to a middle-class family in Cincinnati, Ohio. When compared to the majority of people in the world it means that I was also born into great privilege. I am thankful for that! But, does that mean that God favors me

personally more than he does a mother in Darfur, Sudan, who is working hard to raise her children alone after her husband was murdered? Am I more favored because of my more privileged “accident of longitude and latitude”? “Privilege” should not imply a favored status but a responsibility.

In Luke 4 Jesus declares his mission statement to the world, quoting Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” If the gospel as we demonstrate it in the world does not serve the poor, then it is not the good news! Our privilege, our fortunate accident of longitude and latitude, carries deep responsibility.

We are God’s economic delivery system for serving the least and the lost. As the living, breathing body of Christ, we are the only hands, feet, and wallet God has to accomplish God’s work within the world. Have you ever heard a preacher insist, “God doesn’t need your money. God can do it without your money. You just need to give!” That’s true, we do need to give; but frankly, I



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find the rest of that claim misleading at best and bogus at worst. We are the only bank account that God has. God needs our feet, our hands, our money, and our trust.

I am in my sixties. As I regularly remind my congregation based on the scope and space of a normal lifetime, I am almost dead. James reminds us, “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (Jas. 4:14). Jesus indicated that when we tightly grip the seed we have been given, using it only for ourselves, ultimately it will rot. But if we are willing to give it up, to entrust it into God’s soil, then the seed grows into God’s future harvest.

My daughter and son-in-law used to live in Boston, and during one of our visits Carolyn and I took a detour to visit the Breakers in Newport, Rhode Island, a mansion built by Cornelius Vanderbilt II in the mid-1890s as a “summer home” for when his estate in North Carolina, the Biltmore, got too hot and humid. This summer “cottage” was expansive and beautiful, encompassing 62,482 square feet of living area across five floors. One of the most impressive rooms was the library, filled with leather-bound books that no one ever reads on shelves made from beautiful wood. The tour guide indicated that the library had been built in Europe, disassembled, and then shipped to the United States for reassembling. The gardens also were impressive. The place is now a museum, a tourist attraction. Ironically, the tour guide revealed, Cornelius only visited his new vacation home four times before dying of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1899 at the age of fifty-five. What a great reminder! You can’t take it with you.

Jesus taught us that “from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). I suggest we start living like it, generously and open handedly releasing “our” resources into God’s purposes for the world Christ loves. ☺

¹ “Bono Vox (U2) – Interview 7/9,” YouTube video, 5:42, posted by maniauswien, March 27, 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JVYbrF93bw>

Mike Slaughter is the almost four-decade chief dreamer and lead pastor of Ginghamburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio and the spiritual entrepreneur of ministry marketplace innovations. Mike’s call to “afflict the comfortable” challenges Christians to wrestle with God and their God-destinies. This article is based in part on his book, *The Christian Wallet: Spending, Giving, and Living with a Conscience* (Westminster John Knox Press; 2016).