

Reflect on Our Generous Response
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We will soon be stuffing ourselves with all manner of food as we begin the extended holiday season later this week with Thanksgiving. First fruits is an ancient concept found in many cultures around the world. We even find talk of first fruits in the Old Testament. "Out of all the gifts to you, you shall set apart every offering due to the Lord; the best of all of them is the part to be consecrated." (Numbers 18:29) A person doesn't need to be religious to appreciate the concept of giving the best of what you have to someone else.

I'm a quilter and for me, many of life's questions can often be understood through the lens of quilting. When I think about our theme, I'm struck with the implication that it must involve giving our **best**. My daughter-in-law said something a couple years ago that has stuck with me in a rather uncomfortable way. Amanda works in the pediatric intensive care unit at Mercy Hospital in Des Moines. A few years ago, I made eight quilts for her unit. She told me much later that all the nurses on the unit were happy to use these quilts with the patients because they didn't seem like "after-thoughts." I asked her what she meant, and she said that they get quite a few quilts from groups that seem like they are just trying to get rid of ugly fabrics in the name of doing good. The staff on the unit appreciate the thought and donation, but they liked my quilts better.

I'm not telling this story to make my donation seem better than it was. My point in telling the story is to encourage each one of us to stop and think about our "first-fruits" offerings. Are we giving our "best" effort in our acts of generosity for others?

What are we implying when we make a comment like "Well, it's just a charity quilt," or "they'll be happy with whatever gloves are on sale," or - well, you fill in the blank! When it comes to, let's say quilting, are we dismissing:

- using substandard fabric (stuff I would never use in one of my own quilts) **OR**
- sloppy sewing or a boring pattern **OR**
- using truly mismatched fabrics (like Santa on a motorcycle next to Elvis next to penguins next to flowers) **OR**
- all of the above?

I'm guilty as charged! I've discovered that I do this with other types of giving too. When I forget to pick up items for the food pantry at church, what gets pulled out of my pantry to be donated? Often, it is stuff that I have just avoided using myself. Not exactly the picture of generosity that I would like to see reflected, unfortunately!

Our challenge is to break out our proverbial finest fabrics to make our "charity" quilts in the same way that we would lovingly make them for a loved one. The recipients of such generosity should feel like they've received a gift, and just because they are in a homeless shelter, transitional housing, or fleeing from domestic abuse doesn't make them deserve less than our very best work or efforts.

Meditation Questions

1. Reflect for a moment on how you approach acts of generosity. Have you reflected a “first fruits” approach or something a bit less generous?
2. In your own situation, what is the equivalent of the “finest fabrics” for the type of generosity you practice? How might you implement a more mindful generosity response?

Prayer for Peace

Our God,

We have been blessed by your continued presence in our lives and in our church communities. Many of us experience extraordinary comfort in our daily living. Help us be mindful of what blessings true “first fruits” generosity might bestow on both givers and receivers. Inspire us to find ways to serve those in need of comfort, encouragement, shelter, sustenance, spiritual guidance, food stability, or friendship. Let us not hesitate to share our very best with others. Amen.