

Russ Peterman: [00:03](#) So I was told just before we walked in this morning that they're having trouble with our HVAC this morning, some of you may have picked up on that. I just want to let you know that if you're a little warm, you're not having a hot flash. That's good to know. Actually, you may, I don't know, but the good news is we're all having hot flashes this morning and so if you need to take off your coat or whatever you need to do, please feel free. We're working on it. The HVHC man is on his way is what I was told. As I mentioned earlier, we're starting a new sermon series this morning. We're sort of building off last week's sermon in which we talked about generosity. This series that we're doing, taking the next step coincides with our annual giving campaign. You'll hear more about that in a few moments.

Russ Peterman: [00:50](#) If I could just say one thing though about this campaign that is that you will notice almost right away that this campaign is different, significant, significantly different than what has been done here at UCC in the past. We're taking a different, a deeper approach to giving by diving deeper into the meaning of generosity. And so over the next four weeks we're going to take a journey together to listen to what God has to say about giving about generosity and how your life and your faith can be impacted as you take the next step, both spiritually and in terms of your generosity. You've hopefully have already started receiving the emails, the daily emails this last week, that as a morning devotion chance for you to think about and to pray about a challenge for you each Sunday or each morning. It's, excuse me, and if you've not received those, let us know and we will certainly make sure that you get on that list throughout the next few weeks in this series, I'm going to hope to offer some tools to help us to discover what that next step might be both in our living and also in our giving.

Russ Peterman: [02:03](#) Now, as you know, this is football season and so I'm going to call an audible and you all know what an audible is. Let me pause for just a moment and just say this little editorial comment. This is not my notes, but as a beloved horn frog fan, can I just say football is a stupid game. I just don't like it anymore. I'm giving up and if you are looking for a hobby, if you're looking for a place to end, vote, invest your emotional energy. Don't let it be football because it'll just break your heart weekend and week out. Well, it feel good to have that off my chest. I feel a little, a little sense of relief there. Anyway, I'm calling an audible sort of like a, a quarterback that walks up to the line of scrimmage and he doesn't like the call that's been made and so he kind of looks out and says, this call's not going to be the one that works, the play that they're was called in the huddle and so we calls an

audible, he calls a different play and so this morning I'm calling an audible in.

Russ Peterman: [03:02](#)

That is, I'm asking Orlew to read a different text than what is printed in your worship bulletin. I made this discovery after the bulletins had been printed, and so I'm calling an audible instead of the story from Luke that you see there. I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 26 we're going to be looking at a passage there from the Hebrew scriptures. What we oftentimes refer to as the old Testament and where we find ourselves in this story that the important Exodus narrative where we find ourselves, the Israelites have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. They'd been delivered from slavery in Egypt. They'd been led out by Moses and there they were standing on the edge of the promised land, about to cross over in Moses reminds them of everything that God has done for them up to this point. All that has brought them to this time in their lives. And as they prepare to enter into the promised land, he's giving them instructions on how to be grateful and perhaps even more importantly what to do with that gratitude. So I invite you to listen to this passage from Deuteronomy 26

Orlew Lager: [04:24](#)

from Deuteronomy 26 beginning with verse one when you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all, the fruit of the ground which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God has given you and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him today, I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us. When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God, a wandering Aramian was my ancestor. He went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien few in number and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

Orlew Lager: [06:13](#)

The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with a terrifying display of power and with signs and wonder

Orlew Lager: [06:27](#) and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, Oh Lord have given me. You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house. The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Russ Peterman: [07:24](#) Kent Maillard is now a retired United Methodist pastor, but he served for many years as the senior minister at a large, the United Methodist church in Indianapolis. Before being assigned to that church in Indianapolis, he served another large church in South Dakota. Now obviously to take this new position that was given to him in Indianapolis, that meant for his family that they had to relocate and as sometimes happens and move such as this, not everybody in the family was exactly excited about moving. Kent had a son, Kendall, who was in about second grade at the time. He was eight years old who absolutely did not want to move to a new town. He didn't want to leave his family. He didn't want to leave his friends and he made it very clear to anyone who would ask that he was not happy about this move, but when the Bellard family arrived at the new home in Indianapolis, it was a parsonage that was owned by the church.

Russ Peterman: [08:32](#) When they first walked in the door. Kendall is second grade boy discovered that right there in the living room was this large table that had set up on it in electric train set that was going around and around and around and around the church. You, they the locomotive there, there was a note that was propped up in there and he picked up the note and he opened it and it was a, a note from a family in the congregation and the note said this, this is a gift from the Reuben family for Kendall. Simply said, we hope you enjoy your new home. Now you can imagine the shock and the excitement from the spore to find such a wonderful gift from a family that he didn't even know.

Russ Peterman: [09:16](#) And for the rest of the day, as the movers came in and there's the boxes stacked up all around him, he didn't leave that table and he worked and played with that electric train the entire day. The next morning Kendall came to his father's home office with his hands filled with coins and he just sort of plopped them right there on the table. And this coins quarter rolled all over and he said, dad, I want you to give this to God. His dad, the pastor just sort of said, well, I will tell me. Tell me why is it that you are giving this money to God? And the child answered simply to say thanks. I wanted to say thanks. This boy had

received this generous gift and he was so overwhelmed with gratitude that he wanted to make an offering to God just to say thanks. I suppose you could say that this boy, this child was living a life that was grounded in gratitude.

Russ Peterman: [10:21](#)

The truth is, is that all of us have received abundant gifts at some point in our lives, at the, at the hands of a generous God that God has filled us with the blessings of life and love of family and friends of, of a community. In the congregation of relationships and resources. There's a book called climb higher in which it says true inspiration to be generous occurs when we realize that everything that we have in all that we are is a gift from God. And when we acknowledge God's abundant gifts, we become grateful and gratitude, insights, generosity. In fact, a truly grateful heart, they say, we'll have no alternative but to be a giving and generous heart. And so the question before us this morning is how do we tell God thank you. When we consider all of the generous gifts that God has given to us, how do we respond?

Russ Peterman: [11:25](#)

We live as is, if God has done nothing for us or do our lives reflect like that little boys that we are grounded in gratitude. Now I recognize, I fully admit that living with a sense of gratitude is easier at some times than others. Sometimes it seems the circumstances in which we find ourselves to ground on which we stand is a little Rocky and the circumstances find ourselves that life is hard at times and in those moments it's, let's be honest, it's hard to be grateful. It's hard to live a life of gratitude when life is a bit of a struggle. There's a blogger that I read on a regular basis that says that life is sort of a mixture. Life is a mixture of, of things that are brutal and things that are beautiful. And so to live in that tension, she says, she created a new world, new word.

Russ Peterman: [12:28](#)

She said, life is brutaful and we know that to be true, don't we? Life is brutaful. Anne Lamott says it's easy to thank God for life when things are going well, but life is much bigger than we give it credit for. And much of the time it's harder than we would like. But she says it's a package deal. In other words, life is brutaful and goes on to tell about the story of her son, Sam, who was about seven years old who came to grips, kind of had this revelation, came to the realization that all of us at some point in our lives were going to die. And the next step was to recognize that we were all going to die and it wasn't going to all happen at the same time. And that there was probably going to be a time when he would have to live without his mother, who was the only parent that he had ever known. And when he

came to this realization, when he came to this realization, his seven year old mind, he began to cry. He began to weep, and in through the sobs, he said, if I had known that mom, I wouldn't have agreed to be born.

Russ Peterman: [13:51](#)

And I think some of us feel the same way at times. I admit that sometimes living a life grounded in gratitude can be hard because there are times when life is difficult. Dr. Oliver Sacks wrote a book called gratitude, and he began writing this book. He was a doctor, and he began writing this book in the days after he was diagnosed with a terminal illness. In fact, he wrote it essentially the last few months of his life. That's how he spent his dying days was for write a book, simply entitled gratitude. And he said, my predominant feeling, my final days is one of gratitude. I have loved and I have been loved. I have been given much and I have given something in return. But above all else, I have been alive on this beautiful planet. And that itself has been an enormous privilege in a wild adventure.

Russ Peterman: [14:56](#)

Elie Wiesel is a Holocaust survivor, was a Holocaust survivor. He passed away a number of years ago. He's also an author. He's written a number of books. He won the Nobel prize not long before he passed away. He was interviewed by Oprah Winfrey on her talk show, and in the midst of that conversation she said to him, you know, there may be no better person than you to speak about living with gratitude despite all of the tragedy that you have witnessed, everything that you have endured in your life. How do you still have place? How do you have a place inside of you for gratitude? He said, I have no choice. I have no choice. Right after the war, I went around telling people, thank you just for living, just just for being human. And he said, to this day, the words that come most frequently from my lips are, thank you.

Russ Peterman: [15:56](#)

And then he went on to say, he went on to say for me, for me, every hour is grace. Every hour is grace, grace and gratitude. Gratitude in grace. These, these words are linked. They're intertwined, interconnected. In fact, if you look at the Latin root for grace and gratitude, it's the same root word. And if you look at the ancient Greek, the words for grace and gratitude comes from the same root grace and gratitude that are intertwined. Now, grace, as we all know is, is is an unmerited gift. Something that we receive that we've done nothing to earn, we certainly don't deserve. And remember Wiesel who said, life itself is great, life is an unmerited gift. And each and every one of us, we've received this gift, this grace life is grace. Every hour is grace in the store from Deuteronomy that Orlew read a minute

ago, Moses is speaking to the people of Israel and it's just as they're about to enter into the promised land.

Russ Peterman: [17:15](#) And he's reminding them of everything that God has done for them, how God had delivered them from slavery, reminding them of the law and the covenant, that thing that holds them together, that unites them, not just with each other, but also with God. It was both the vertical and the horizontal that had this way of holding us together. And now as he's preparing for them to enter into the promised land, he's giving them instructions on how to be grateful in this new land that has been given to them in what I love about this text and part of the reason that I asked that she read it is, is there is this really beautiful ambiguity that exists in the text. I'm a bit of a Bible nerd and I find this sort of stuff interesting, but towards the end in verse 10 the text says this, so now I bring the first fruit of the ground that you, Oh Lord have given me, I bring the first fruit of the ground that you or Lord have given me.

Russ Peterman: [18:18](#) He was reminding them ostensibly that that according to the law, that they were to bring the first fruits to bring a portion of the harvest as an offering to God. That part is pretty clear that they and we are to bring the first fruit of the ground that God has given us, and that's what we do every Sunday when we take up the offering, we offer up as an act of worship. The first fruits of the harvest that God has given us that week. Sometimes we forget and think that the offering is just sort of paying the bills, sort of a commercial break for the church, but it's not. It's an act of worship. What we bring, what we offer is an act of worship. That part's pretty clear, but the ambiguous part, the ambiguous part, the part that's not clear is whether that Moses was saying the first fruit that you, Oh Lord have given me as in the fruit is what God has given us or or is Moses saying that God has given the ground the first fruit of the ground, which you all Lord have given me.

Russ Peterman: [19:33](#) You see, there's a difference there. In other words, are we thanking God for the fruit or are we thanking God for the ground? Now there's two words that are used in this passage. Some are, some is translated as Lawand and some as ground. The word for land is air. It's a Hebrew word that that talks about land in the large grand conceptual sense like the promise land, the land that God has given the land of the free, the home of the brave, that type of land. Now the other word that is oftentimes translated as ground is Adama, which probably hopefully sounds familiar to you. It's where the word Adam comes from. You may remember it in the the creation story

there at the beginning that Adam Adam is made from the dirt. God breathes life into the dirt Adama means dirt soil, and when we see that word Adama, they're talking about the ground that you can touch the ground, that you can touch, that you can feel, that you can run your fingers through the kind of that gets stuck underneath your fingernails when you're working in the garden.

Russ Peterman: [20:53](#) You see Moses is saying, you might well be able to take credit for the harvest. What you bring home each week for the work that you do, the hard work, the the sacrifice that it took in order to bear that fruit. But Moses is saying you had nothing to do with the dirt. You had nothing to do with the dirt, with the fertile soil that brings forth the fruit, the ground upon which you stand, your livelihood, your very life. This, this is what God has given us. The ground adama the stuff of life, the things that that life is made out of the foundation, the ground, the very ground of our existence.

Russ Peterman: [21:41](#) All of our lives are built upon that ground. All of life is a gift. Moses is saying, life is a gift. Every hour is grace. The right response to this gift is gratitude. He says, the live lives grounded in gratitude. It's not just the right response when things go well, when life is easy, when life is beautiful, but it's also the right response when real gratitude. See, real gratitude is rooted in the giftedness of life and recognize that even the brutal parts God is there too. Real gratitude is rooted in the giftedness of life and awareness that all of life, every hour, every breath, every brutaful moment is a gift. It's grace. It sees the good things that come our way, not simply as blessings for which we can be thankful for, but no, none of those good things are a means. They're tools for us to be able to use to express our gratitude that these good things are not for me to enjoy, but for me to use to express my gratitude for the gift of life, the very ground of my existence.

Russ Peterman: [23:14](#) You see the same way that the harvest is not the blessing. The harvest is the way in which we show thanks. The blessing of the ground in our gratitude for that original gift, that foundational gift that calls us to bow down before God, who gave us that gift to offer the first fruits of the bounty that God has given us. You see real gratitude to be grounded in gratitude. That's not something we do on Sunday mornings. It's a way of life. It's a way of living. It's a way that sees all of life is the gift that everything that flows from that gift is something that we offer back in gratitude. The one who is the source of all of life. Great. Mystic and philosopher, Meister Eckhart once said that if the

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only prayer we ever pray in our entire life, if the only prayer we ever pray is thank you, that will be enough.

Russ Peterman: [24:29](#)

Church, may we live lives grounded in gratitude and may the most frequent words that come from our lips.

Speaker 3: [24:38](#)

Be "thank you".