



**PASS
ON
THE GIFTSM**

A Sermon on Passing on the Gift

Exodus 19:1-8

Acts 2:1-13

Today we celebrate Heifer International. Many of you know Heifer International as the group that gives animals to people. But Heifer is a bit larger than that. Heifer states that its mission is to “work with communities to end hunger and poverty and care for the earth.”

Today is a celebration of what Heifer calls Passing on the Gift. A basic idea built around the idea “sharing is good.” But it goes a little beyond that. When someone receives training for sometimes up to a year on how to care for the livestock, then receives the animal, the animal is a living loan until one thing happens. The recipient must take the first offspring of that animal and pass it on to another person in the village. Then, and only then, do they own the original animal.

So today, in this place, we also have opportunity to join with Heifer in passing on the gifts we have. But before we talk about the idea of passing on the gift, we need to talk about the first part of Heifer’s mission statement. Those of you who know Heifer have really focused on the idea of ending hunger and poverty through the animals, some maybe even caring for the earth, but today we focus on the beginning of that mission: to work with communities.

The scriptures chosen today celebrate people coming together for some very significant events. The first is the gathering of the people before Mt. Sinai before receiving the law. Over and over again in the Bible this calling together is called “THE assembly,” and as such leads to future gatherings, which leads to community.

The New Testament scripture calls to mind the celebration of that Old Testament event. At Pentecost, when the people gathered together to celebrate the receiving of the law, the assembly experienced the start of something new again. Many people call this passage “the beginning of the church as we know it.” The people were so filled with this common purpose, people thought they were partying. It is that Spirit that allows people to build community.

But in both passages it is important to note that the people were united in their thinking and their doings; Building community. It is the uniting of people and purpose. In the Old Testament passage it states in Exodus 19:8 that “the people answered as one.” In the New Testament passage it speaks of the people all being “in one accord.” Building community.

In Swahili they have a word used to describe the idea of bringing together people and purpose. It is Harambe. It literally means “pulling together as one.” The image is that of a Tug-of-War game but all are pulling together in the same direction for a common cause. It is the idea of an Amish barn raising, a potluck dinner with great cooks, a soup kitchen or a Heifer Living Gift Market. Harambe is seen in those people in Acts as a party atmosphere that unites a community to work together for a common cause. Hard work? Sometimes, yes. But it is each one doing his or her part to achieve the common goal. Heifer has used the word and the idea of how they work in communities throughout the world. Harambe connotes the idea of all of us working together to end hunger and poverty, and care for the earth.

This Harambe concept can be seen in any of the 125 countries where Heifer has been. One such place is northern Thailand. On the border with Laos and Myanmar is a small village deep in the mountains. There the people were struggling to make ends meet. The men were leaving the village to find decent employment; the children were leaving the village as soon as they were old enough; it was a dying community and the villagers were looking for a way to prevent hunger and poverty in their area along with ways to revitalize their community. They began to partner with Heifer in small ways at first. The community came together around the idea of growing crops in the fertile area around the nearby river. The garden grew and the villagers then decided to raise fish below the garden as the runoff would provide great nourishment for the fish. So Heifer worked to educate the villagers on the basics of raising fish and then introduced fish in a pond. Next the villagers decided to raise livestock. So Heifer again worked with them to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to raise water buffalo, which would provide even more tilling power and more fertilizer for the garden. All the while the community was bonding together for a common cause. The men are now deciding to stay in the village, the youth are finding new ways to connect with their families. The community is thriving.

Heifer rallies these communities through a proven methodology called Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development. These twelve principles, used for more than 60 years, light the way for people who are on the road to self-reliance. Cornerstones stimulate group wisdom and personal insights, and they keep people's hearts, minds and actions balanced, focused and productive. Together, they form the acronym **PASSING GIFTS** and echo the quintessential Cornerstone and trademark practice that makes Heifer unique and its projects sustainable.

[Passing on the Gift](#)
[Accountability](#)
[Sharing and Caring](#)
[Sustainability and Self-Reliance](#)
[Improved Animal Management](#)
[Nutrition and Income](#)
[Gender and Family Focus](#)

ON THE

[Genuine Need and Justice](#)
[Improving the Environment](#)
[Full Participation](#)
[Training and Education](#)
[Spirituality](#)

So now it is our turn as a community. For in the New Testament reading today, the people had come together “in one accord.” Literally translated it means “fierce togetherness.” They came together as one people with a purpose. No one could divide them or keep them from their purpose. No one could stop them from passing on their gifts. And Heifer works with us as well to pass on our gifts. It might be our gift of time, talents, or treasure; Heifer uses them all. But the idea is to give because it has been given to you. Not only because it benefits others, but also because it binds us together as a community. It helps us become one body with fierce togetherness.

Heifer has been at their work, our work, since 1944. The animals are the method to the end result of ending hunger and poverty. But the focus is on the people in community united for a common cause. That is what will literally change the world and as the passages of scripture pointed out, it already has. And today we have inherited that legacy. We are people who the gift has been passed on to and we are required to pass on our gifts. For only in the passing on of our gifts do the gifts we have received become truly ours.

In one of Heifer’s passing on the gift ceremonies, a basket of rabbits was being passed on between two women. Both were in tears as the empty basket of one was being filled and the other was being emptied. As the two women continued, the one giving the gift shared through her tears that she felt wonderful because it was the first time she had enough to share. The recipient was holding her chest, patting it slowly. When asked why she said, “I understood I was to receive these animals and as I went through the training Heifer gave, I understood what it would mean to me and my family, but now my heart is full. This is what hope feels like.”

We all need to experience what hope feels like. We need to know what it is like to receive and what it is like to pass on our gifts. It will take all, the entire world community and our local church community, to end hunger and poverty and care for the earth. That is why Heifer works with all communities; those with financial assets and those that have no financial assets but have other gifts to offer. Heifer has given us the opportunity to be in “one accord” with them in the common cause. And through that opportunity it unites us as a local community as well. For when we stand together united in purpose, we can and should change the world. Let’s pass on our gifts!

Harambe!

And thanks be to the God who passes gifts to us!