

More Than Enough

The second of three sermons in the
2018 Stewardship Commitment Series “Plant Many Seeds”
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Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
October 15, 2017

- Proverbs 3:9-10 Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. (New Revised Standard Version)
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 ⁶ Remember that the person who plants few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop. ⁷ You should each give, then, as you have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly. ⁸ **And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause.** ⁹ As the scripture says, “He gives generously to the needy; his kindness lasts forever.” ¹⁰ And God, who supplies seed for the sower and bread to eat, will also supply you with all the seed you need and will make it grow and produce a rich harvest from your generosity. ¹¹ He will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times, so that many will thank God for your gifts which they receive from us. ¹² For this service you perform not only meets the needs of God's people, but also produces an outpouring of gratitude to God. ¹³ And because of the proof which this service of yours brings, many will give glory to God for your loyalty to the gospel of Christ, which you profess, and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else. ¹⁴ And so with deep affection they will pray for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown you. ¹⁵ Let us thank God for his priceless gift! (Good News Translation)
- Theme: What we need “more of” is appreciation of how greatly God already blesses us!

This morning’s key scripture verse from our New Testament passage is the verse in bold print on the bulletin cover (it’s a different one from what was highlighted last week). This verse is one that I learned in a moment of mild panic.

A few weeks ago you got to meet our seminary intern Marilyn Panco (or “M.P.” as she prefers to be called.) When I was in seminary, I did a seminary internship, too. Officially, internships are called “field education” because you are supposed to learn “in the field” (that is, in a local congregation) what you can’t learn in a seminary classroom. I did my “field education” at First Presbyterian Church of Deerfield, a thousand-member congregation in one of Chicago’s north shore suburbs. I was one of two student interns from McCormick Seminary on Deerfield’s staff that year.

It was a valuable learning experience. It was also a mostly unpleasant experience, not because of the wonderful church members. No, for the entire year the pastor (who was our supervisor) treated us with disregard at best and a lack of respect.

At that church we seminary interns were in the front of the church helping to lead worship for every service. The church’s associate pastor had warned us to be ready for anything in worship. We soon understood what he meant. On one of our first Sundays the two ministers and we two seminary interns were processing into the worship service, following the choir down the main aisle. As we approached the steps up to the chancel the pastor turned to me and said, “You’re doing the call for the offering this morning.”

When you’ve been leading worship for several years you learn how to call for an offering or give a benediction or offer a prayer “on the fly.” But when you’re new at leading worship you want to prepare carefully so you know *how* to do what you need to do. At that point in my fledgling ministry career I

didn't know what to say later in the service to invite people to give their offerings. So while we were singing the first hymn I was also going through a Bible trying to find some verse I could use to introduce the morning collection.

And that's how I discovered 2 Corinthians 9:8 which, in various translations, says something like "God has given us every good gift in abundance so that we might always have all that we need for ourselves, and more than enough for every good cause."

That verse has stayed with me ever since. After I arrived at this church that verse served as the theme for my very first financial stewardship commitment campaign. It's memorialized in one of our stewardship banners hanging on the wall.

I love 2 Corinthians 9:8 in part because it rescued me that morning during worship at "First Pres. Deerfield." And I love 2 Corinthians 9:8 because of four affirmations the verse contains. Look at that verse in bold print on the bulletin cover and find these four assertions:

1. God is the source of our gifts (i.e., "God is able to give you...")
2. God blesses us abundantly (i.e., "more than you need").
3. We have all that we need (i.e., "you always have all you need for yourselves").
4. We also always have enough for other good works (i.e., "more than enough for every good cause").

More than enough.

More than enough. That's an expression of compassionate care. That's an expression of generosity. That's an expression of hospitality. "More than enough" was the unwritten rule in my Grandmother Thompson's heart. She was a country girl all her life. Always lived within thirty miles of where she was born in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. I remember how she exhibited southern hospitality when people came for dinner, placing on the table *heaping* bowls of vegetables that never went empty and serving chicken *and* roast beef *and* pork chops. She was raised to know that you always tried to offer more than enough.

That's pretty bold for St. Paul to claim that not only does God's abundance cover our needs but provides us with "more than enough" to satisfy needs beyond ourselves.

What is "more than enough?"

I've never had anyone say this to me: "You know, I give too much money to God's work through my church. I'm sure it would be better for all concerned if I spent more on myself, or even just held onto my money indefinitely for no particular reason."

No, almost every one of us wrestles with the question of "giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, giving to God what is God's." We wonder, "What's the right amount? How much money am I expected to give?" And we also may wonder, "What do others give?" because we want to compare our generosity with someone else's. But that's an unreliable exercise because we don't always know what others are dealing with behind the scenes.

- We may not know about their substantial out-of-pocket expenses for chronic health issues.
- We may not know how someone is slowly, steadily straining to recover from severe indebtedness.
- We may not know that someone received a sizeable inheritance.
- We might not be aware that someone is enduring a long stretch of unemployment.
- We may not realize that someone's helping to launch an adult child or caring for and supporting an aging relative.

Yes, it's impractical to try to compare our generosity with someone else's because we probably don't know everything about their situation in life.

If, indeed, God has given us "all that we need" and "more than enough for every good cause," then what is God making possible for my response of grateful, faithful stewardship? To answer such an earthly question let's seek the guidance of Holy Scripture. Here's something I came across in a stewardship guide some years ago – it's a rather lengthy quotation.

The Bible says three things about how much, at the least, we should give in gratitude to God:

1. The Old Testament speaks of **first fruits** giving, in which what is shared from all we have been given comes “off the top” – a good reminder that, before all else, God and what God does for us is priority number one in our lives.
2. Then, the Old Testament teaches, and the New Testament presumes, the **tithe** – the giving of ten percent of one’s income and belongings through one’s place of worship.
3. The New Testament, and particularly St. Paul, go beyond tithing to teach **proportionate giving** – meaning the more we have, the more we should give.

All together, these three measures or standards might be expressed this way: In gratitude to God for all that God in Christ does for us, we should give at least 10% of our income right off the top, going beyond that in proportion to what we have.

Some of us will protest that this is much more than we can do. But is this not also the case with Jesus’ command to love our enemies? And what of the other hard demands of following Christ? Do they not go far beyond what we think reasonable and practical?

The best response to high standards is not to lower them to a comfortable level, but to ask for God’s grace and guidance to help us grow. God’s biddings are God’s enablings; we’re never asked to do anything we’re not also enabled to do.

The solution for those who feel they cannot tithe is to respect the standard and grow towards it by the grace and guidance of God. (Perhaps, for some, this will mean accepting a standard of not 10%, but 3% as a first step. Whatever one’s level of giving, a commitment can be made to accept the tithe as one’s standard and to move toward it on some fixed basis.)...

All that we have and are come[s] from God or lead[s] to God. Nothing is outside God’s provision and providence. Above all, we have been given the One who makes all this known and possible: Jesus, our Savior and Friend, who is Christ, our Lord.”¹

The brief selection we heard earlier from the Old Testament book of Proverbs presented yet again what we might call “the mystery of generosity.” Those verses from Proverbs chapter 3 asserted that in showing our gratitude to God by returning a portion for God’s honor and work, we find our attics still filled and our frosted mugs still overflowing. Remember this?

- ⁹Honor the Lord with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce;
¹⁰then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.²

But for us to freely and gratefully give, first we must recognize that God has given us more than we need so that we always have what we need for ourselves and still more than enough for every good cause.

Roger Perks is a fellow Presbyterian minister who’s preached here in the past. You may remember him for his rich, Ross Brochhagen-like speaking voice or his charming native New Zealand accent. Roger and I are in the same Rotary club and we carpool to the weekly lunch meetings. This past Monday as we drove to Memorial Hall for the meeting Roger said to me, “I love the colors of fall. God has made such a beautiful world, don’t you think?” Having just preached a stewardship sermon the previous day, my frame of mind that morning caused me to reply, “Roger, God certainly made this world, but each of us decides whether or not to notice that it is beautiful.”

God doesn’t compel you to “give... or else.” God invites you to discover your capacity to be grateful and generous. In your life notice that “...God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause.”

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¹ From “What Scripture Says About Giving” produced by Stewardship and Church Finances of the United Church of Christ.

² Proverbs 3:9-10 New Revised Standard Version