

No Regret

The third of three sermons in the
2018 Stewardship Commitment Series “Plant Many Seeds”
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Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
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- Matthew 6:25-33³¹ “So do not start worrying: ‘Where will my food come from? or my drink? or my clothes?’³² (These are the things the pagans are always concerned about.) Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things.³³ Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things. (Good News Translation)
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-15⁶ 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: God loves everyone, and delights when we share joyfully.

Two men were stranded on a deserted island. One seemed cheerful and upbeat. The other was nervous and dispirited. The second man spoke first: “Why are you so happy? Don’t you know we’ll never be found? We’ll both surely die on this forsaken island.”

“Cheer up,” replied the first man. “We’ll be just fine. My church pledge is due [on Sunday], and I know the [Stewardship] committee will find me!”¹

Today’s sermon is the third in my three-part series called “Plant Many Seeds.” That theme comes from a verse in 2 Corinthians Chapter 9. In that part of his letter St. Paul is commending the decision of the Christians in Corinth to take up a love offering for the sake of the beleaguered Christians in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 9:6 Paul encourages their generosity by declaring that “...the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop.”² Two weeks ago in the first installment of the series called “Make It Grow” we recalled that God is both the source and the means of our fruitfulness – our ability to live fulfilling, constructive lives. Last Sunday in the second installment called “More Than Enough” we determined that what we need “more” of is appreciation for the blessings God fills our lives with.

This past week I read about a pastor who received a note from a boy in his congregation. The note read as follows:

¹ Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money: messages for spiritual growth through giving*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, 16

² 2 Corinthians 9:6b Good News Translation

Dear Pastor, I'm sorry I can't leave more money in the plate on Sunday, but my father didn't give me a raise in my allowance. Could you give a sermon about a raise in my allowance? It would help the church get more money.³

Well, with due respect to that little boy wherever he is, that's not the direction I decided to take with the sermon today. No, in this third installment of the "Plant Many Seeds" series I want us to consider what it means to give with no regret. The key verse for today's message is in bold text on the bulletin cover. Verse 7 reads, "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."

If we take a moment to parse that verse we'll discover several lessons contained in it.

First, Paul writes, "You should each give, then...." Note that Paul is speaking to the entire church in Corinth. He's not speaking only to the entrepreneurs, or to the founding members, or to the merchants who've made their fortunes plying the seas to trade goods between Africa and Europe and Asia Minor, or to the footloose and fancy-free young urban professionals in the "greater Corinth metroplex." No, Paul is addressing all of them just as I'm addressing all of you, Paul is addressing all of them when he says, "You should each give, then...." On your bulletin circle the word "each."

Going on, he writes "...give, then, as you have decided...." Generosity is not a mindless, formulaic response as in, "If you have this much, then you *will* give that much." But neither is generosity as a response of gratitude something to be done only impulsively, when someone pulls at your heartstrings like those sad TV commercials seeking donations to help abused dogs and cats. For both the Corinthians and we Presbyterians Paul believes that forethought is important – sincere generosity as an expression of sincere gratitude warrants our contemplation, prayer, a thoughtful decision-making process: "...give, then, as you have decided...." On your bulletin circle the word "decided."

Then Paul presents my favorite part of the verse. Each is to give as you have decided, he writes, "not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly." Generosity is not just an amount; it's also an attitude. Generosity is not fully present if a gift is made begrudgingly, or out of a sense of obligation or guilt, or because we hope to avoid some kind of threat.

Paul concludes the verse with the assertion that "God loves the one who gives gladly." You may be more familiar with the verse when it's translated "God loves a cheerful giver."

A church like ours is all about cheerful giving: coming together week by week to give one another the gifts of friendship, encouragement, counsel, comfort. Our church is all about cheerful giving: giving our time and skill and energy so the church can do its work day by day. Our church is all about cheerful giving: putting a portion of our talent and treasure toward providing food and clothing and water and shelter and education and medicine to people on home and foreign soils who are in desperate need our cheerful gifts.

...No regrets. When each of us decides to make a gift in grateful response to God's abundant goodness, our giving should not be done with regret because of what we could have done otherwise. Circle either the phrase "not with regret" or the phrase "gives gladly" – you choose!

I get that. I feel joy when I fill out our pledge card. I feel joy when I make an online contribution to an area theatre. I feel joy when I write a check to support a cancer society. I even feel joy when I purchase a can of overpriced fundraiser Cub Scout popcorn. Do you experience that, too? I don't regret that I could have used that money for a round of golf or a dinner at Pearl of the Orient or an adult beverage at Progressive Field. To quote that James Brown song, "I feel good!" Being able to be generous gives me joy.

³ Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money: messages for spiritual growth through giving*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, 62

It shouldn't be completely surprising that studies have demonstrated that "Generous givers are typically happier and more spiritually vigorous than those who are not generous. It has nothing to do with the size of the gift. It has to do with the level of generosity with what we happen to have."⁴ Indeed, I read about a United Methodist minister who has this crazy idea that if you cannot give with joy, you should tear up your pledge card.⁵

"Someone has said that the world uses people to make money while the church uses money to make people."⁶ "The primary purpose of giving is not to help the institutional church but to help the giver grow spiritually. According to Jesus, getting our treasure invested right helps us get our heart invested right."⁷ Recall the gospel reading you heard this morning. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus redirects the crowd's focus from their daily needs to their spiritual need:

"So do not start worrying: 'Where will my food come from? or my drink? or my clothes?' ...Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. ³³ Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things."

A buddy or your spouse might ask you sometimes, "How much money do you have?" But Jesus seems to ask us, "How does money have you?" because he knows the power of money to make us think only of ourselves.

A minister vows that this really happened: a woman in his church came up to him one day and said,

"Pastor, I really love this time of year."

"You mean the fall colors and the crisp autumn air?" he asked.

"No, that's not what I mean at all," she said. "I mean the stewardship campaign."

"You've got to be kidding," he responded. "You actually like this time of year?"

"Yes, and I'll tell you why. This time of year makes me take stock of my life. It makes me think deeply about my priorities. It makes me ask if I am living the way God is calling me to live."⁸

I'd say it sounds like that woman discovered the faith needed to heed the guidance of Jesus that we should, "...be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what [God] requires of you, and [God] will provide you with all [the] things [you need]." Her discovery is our opportunity – to welcome this annual "stewardship season" as a time to take stock: To what degree are we still clutching (at) the things of this world? To what degree have we released our stranglehold on *things* and opened our hands and hearts to allowing God to direct our lives?

There is no regret when our giving is motivated by gratitude and characterized by joy. "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." Yes, even autumn is a growing season in which we are invited to "Plant many seeds."

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⁴ Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money: messages for spiritual growth through giving*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, 41

⁵ Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money: messages for spiritual growth through giving*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, 18

⁶ Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money: messages for spiritual growth through giving*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, 41

⁷ Herb Miller, *Money Isn't IS Everything: what Jesus said about the spiritual power of money*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1994, 7

⁸ From Norman Neaves, Church of the Servant (Oklahoma City), as cited in Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money: messages for spiritual growth through giving*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, 11