

## “Multiplication”

First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
November 19, 2017

**Old Testament lesson: Psalm 112:5-9**

**New Testament lesson: 2 Corinthians 9:6-10**

Henry Ford was on vacation in Dublin, Ireland, when he was asked to contribute toward the building of a new orphanage. He promptly wrote a check for 2,000 pounds. When he picked up a newspaper the next day, his generosity was in the headlines, but the paper had gotten the amount wrong – instead of 2,000, readers were told Mr. Ford had given 20,000.

The director of the orphanage apologized and offered to phone the newspaper and correct the error. “There’s no need for that,” Ford said. “I’ll give you a check for the remaining 18,000 pounds, but only on one condition. When the new building opens, I want this inscription on it: ‘I was a stranger, and you took me in.’”

You may recognize that inscription from the Bible, where Jesus talks about separating the sheep from the goats. “I was a stranger, and you took me in,” ... “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, ... I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

*That* is the inscription for those who participate in the work of the Lord. That is the inscription for each and every one of you. By your presence here today, you are participating in the work of the Lord. I hope you know that, and feel it.

As it says in our Book of Order – which is the PC(USA)’s governing document – “The Church’s life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ’s ongoing life and work.”<sup>1</sup> And elsewhere, “The worship of the triune God is the center of our common life and our primary way of witness to the faith, hope, and love we have in Jesus Christ.” We are sent out in service to glorify the same God who is present and active in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Today is Pledge Sunday, when we focus on all the ways we are sent out in service to glorify God, and particularly through our gifts of time, talent and money. Holy Scripture provides us with the assurance that the gifts we give to and through the church are multiplied. In 2 Corinthians it says, “The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

And what struck me is that both reap a harvest, the one who sows sparingly and of course the one who sows bountifully – God grows and uses all gifts. The problem is some people don’t feel worthy in their giving, even though God is ready to honor it and multiply it. Maybe it’s because they can’t do what they used to, or can’t give what they’d like to. And that makes them feel bad.

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<sup>1</sup> Book of Order 2017-2019, PC(USA), F-1.0201

<sup>2</sup> Book of Order 2017-2019, PC(USA), W-1.0101–W-1.0104.

If you are giving of yourself in anyway, don't fall into that trap of self-criticism. No matter what you can give – even if it's just the time and effort to come to worship – God uses that and multiplies it.

Your presence here matters. It's not about how we measure gifts and add things up. What matters is how God adds things up, how God multiplies our giving through this congregation.

God longs to bless your life through your giving. And so, we receive this instruction in 2 Corinthians, "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

God's greatest desire is that you be a cheerful giver, because God's greatest joy is in loving you – loving us – and having us love God in return.

No one can be forced to love. That's pretty clear. No argument there. And it's the same with giving. No one can be forced to give, though there was one pastor who tried to force the giving.

The story goes that the pastor of a tiny country church had been having trouble with stewardship and tithes and offerings. One Sunday he announced, "Now, before we receive the offering, I would like to request that the person who stole the eggs from Widow Jones's chicken coop please refrain from giving any money to the Lord. God doesn't want money from a thieving sinner." With that, the offering plate was passed, and for the first time in months everybody gave. No one wanted to be seen as a thieving sinner.

While I wouldn't exactly put it that way for anyone here not prepared to give and pledge today, I do pray that everyone is planning to give. I pray this for the sake of each and every person here, as individuals.

We come here today joyfully bringing our 2018 pledge cards, as an offering of thanksgiving, knowing that God is looking upon us with joy.

God is overjoyed that you believe in and love the Lord more than anything, that you serve in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that you strive everyday to love your neighbor as yourself. So why not take joy in that? Let your pledge for 2018 be a testament to God and all creation of just who you are as a child of God.

As a child of God you share in the blessings that God gives. You are not only a recipient of God's blessings, but you are instrumental in others being blessed by God.

Whether it is through the missions work of this church; the Christian nurture and formation of Presbyterian Women, Sunday school or LOGOS; the fellowship and worship that we share – no matter how you participant in the life of First Church – others are blessed through you. It is a privilege, an honor, and a joy.

If you do not feel that, take some time this week to search your heart. Do you truly believe what we read in scripture? "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, "so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."

All that we have comes from God above and is given as a blessing to us to be shared with others. As it says in Corinthians, "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."

There's only one way this blessing does not come to fruition and that's, – if we hold back. When we fall short in giving of ourselves or when we don't appreciate that we actually have something to give, there is no blessing in that.

But when we stand firm in the faith that God created us as an instrument of his blessing, God takes whatever it is we give and multiplies it. This is not only the Lord's Table of Holy Communion. This is God's multiplication table, the peace where our gifts and pledges will be increased in value as we bring them in joy and thanksgiving. Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

God of steadfast love and faithfulness, we your people kneel at the altar. Some of us come offering praise, for your power has delivered us from a time of trial.

Some of us come with desperate pleas for your strength and protection as we face life's dark valleys.

But in all things, both good and bad, we come with thanksgiving, for all you have done and all you will do for us

We pray for friends and loved ones we now lift up to you in this moment of silence.

Thank you, Lord, for hearing our prayers. Thank you for providing a meal of Thanksgiving through the faithful souls of this church.

Thank you for the humble privilege of gathering at table with our neighbors and friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We know that your steadfast love will surround us, bless us, and strengthen us for your purpose.

It is in the Spirit of love, the Spirit of Christ that we pray, as he taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**