

Sermon 25 July 2021 Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6-9 Luke 6:37-38

Winston Churchill said, 'We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.' Never was a truer word spoken.

In our Gospel reading Jesus makes the point that what you give, you will get back. He was speaking of something he knew a bit about. His whole ministry was one of generosity, giving all he'd got to give to everyone who needed it.

As with forgiveness, which Jesus touches on in this passage, it is a topic that crops up quite a bit throughout the New Testament. Paul, as we heard in his second letter to the people of Corinth, expands this theme, literally, by making the point that the more we give, the more we receive. He uses the analogy of sowing seed: *'The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.'* I get the feeling he is tapping into Jesus's habit of using images that are familiar with his listeners, or in this case, his readers. His analogy has an echo of the parable of the sower as told by Jesus.

Now obviously, if we sow sparingly, the resulting crop will be sparse. Conversely, seed sown generously will result in a bountiful crop. And it is just the same when it comes to giving.

It is a maxim of life. The more you give, the more you receive. And the beauty of it all is that we never really know how our giving will be returned. Invariably, the return will be something quite unexpected, something which takes us by surprise.

There is an amazing story that came out of the 2004 tsunami in Thailand, supposedly true. Every morning this man would go to the edge of a lagoon connected to the ocean to feed fish with a loaf of bread. One morning, a big crocodile appeared. Unperturbed, the kind man threw a few slices of bread to the crocodile. The croc snapped them up and swam away. From that day on, the crocodile would come every morning for his breakfast of sliced bread and then swim peacefully away.

The man was feeding the fish the morning the tsunami came. Being close to the water's edge, he was swept up in the strong current and carried out to sea. At first, he tried holding on to a wooden chair, but the force of the current was so strong that the chair was torn from his grasp. Then he grabbed on to another piece of floating wood, and that too was pulled away from him. Close to drowning, he grabbed on to a log of wood that was floating past him. He managed to hold on to that and suck in some air.

Coming back to his senses, he noticed something very odd. Whereas every object was being dragged by the current out to sea, his log was moving in the opposite direction back to the shore. When he was close enough to dry land, the man jumped off the log and scrambled up the bank to safety. Only then did he notice that his 'log' had a tail. It was the crocodile! You just never know how you are going to get repaid.

This brings us to the question of giving to our church, or as practised by some, tithing. A tithe means a tenth of something and is something that is given. It is good to tithe, it is good to give to our church, but it is important that we give only what we can manage.

Jesus actually had a warning about tithing. In this particular instance he was, as he was prone to do, giving a serve to the Pharisees. *'Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law – justice, mercy and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things.'* Matthew 23:23. He is saying that tithing should be very much a part of the big picture embracing mercy and faith.

Coming back to giving to our church. I will be saying something about this in next week's newsletter, but the bottom line is we rely on your generosity to survive. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it costs money to run a church. We are not a huge congregation and we are struggling financially. This time last year we were a few thousand dollars in the black. At the moment, we are a few thousand dollars in the red. Therein lies the challenge for us. I will leave it at that.

I want to make a brief point here. I have focussed on giving in monetary terms but as we well know, we can give in a myriad of ways – our time, care, kindness, our love – but the principle is still the same. We can give in a myriad of ways and can be expected to receive in return in a myriad of ways. A bit like the man and the crocodile in our story.

Earlier in Matthew's Gospel Jesus makes the point that if we show mercy, we will receive mercy in return. *'God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy in return.'* Matthew 5:7. That verse, of course, is part of what we know as the Beatitudes. Once again, we have this idea, this concept of giving leading to receiving. It is very difficult to get away from this notion.

In the end, our relationship with God is dependent, amongst other things, on what we give. In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus tells the story of the rich fool who stored up the produce from extensive crops in barns, building bigger barns because the existing barns were overflowing. God said to him, *'You fool! You will die tonight. Then who will get it all?'* Jesus commented, *'Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.'*

So we need to be careful that we are not like the rich fool who kept everything for himself and gave nothing away. He died receiving no reward at all.

I want to make a small observation. I have never seen an unhappy generous person, nor have I seen a happy mean person.

The final word goes to American author, Jackson Brown Jnr, *'Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more.'*

Reverend Warner Wilder