

Sermon 28 June 2026 Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6-9 Luke 6:33-38

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: '*Give and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full – pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.*' Luke 6:38. 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 our first reading, expands this theme, literally, by making the point that the more we give, the more we receive. He uses the analogy of sowing seed: '*Remember this – a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop.*' 2 Corinthians 9:6. I get the feeling he is tapping into Jesus' 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 with 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 large 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 very 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 pilled 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 grace and faith.

Coming back to giving to our church. We will be saying something about this a little later at notices time but bottom line is we rely on your generosity to function. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it costs money to run a church. We are not a huge congregation and we do have something of a challenge in paying our way. Therein lies the challenge for us. At this point I will leave it at that.

Jesus makes the point on more than one occasion that giving in monetary terms and a relationship with God are very closely related. There is the instance recorded in Luke's gospel where Jesus is asked by a rich man what he must do to get eternal life. Jesus tells him that he

must sell all he has and give the money to the poor: *'Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. But when the man heard this, he became very sad, for he was very rich.'* Luke 18:22. So the man was naturally not too happy about this. Jesus then goes on to say, *'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.'* Luke 18:25. So, the message is, giving our money to a good cause will enhance our relationship with God. I don't need to tell you that I believe our church to be a good cause!

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 then commented, *'Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.'* Luke 12:21.

I want to make two points here. Firstly, I don't believe there is anyone here who is actually storing up huge reservoirs of wealth, but the point Jesus is making is that it is in the giving of a portion of what we do have that we enhance our relationship with God.

The second point, a point I have made on previous occasions, is this. When we put this giving into practice, we feel good about ourselves, we feel happy. This is part and parcel of being part of God's Kingdom. Some years ago, a study carried out by a Harvard Business School professor, found that giving money to a worthy cause lifted happiness more than spending it on themselves.

A similar study at about the same time carried out by the Berkley national Institute of Health found that when people give to charity, it activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection and trust, creating a warm glow effect. Let me relate to you a fable.

A wise woman who was travelling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day, she met a traveller who was hungry, and the woman opened her bag to share some food with him. The hungry traveller saw the precious stone and asked the woman if she would give it to him. She did so without hesitation.

The traveller left rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth a lot. But the next day he came back to return the stone to the woman. 'I've been thinking,' he said, 'I know how valuable this stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Please give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me this stone.'

American author, Jackson Brown Jnr, said, *'Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more.'* And a quote from Proverbs 3:9-10: *'Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.'*

I finish with something I hope will bring a smile to your face. A one dollar note met up with a 50 dollar note and said, 'Hi. Where've you been? Haven't seen you around here much lately.' The 50 dollar note replied, 'Oh, I have been hanging out at the casinos, went on a cruise and did the rounds of the ship, back to New Zealand and then went to a couple of restaurants, to the shopping mall, that kind of stuff. What about you?' The one dollar note said, 'You know, same old stuff – church, church, church.'