

Sermon for Sunday, October 18, 1970 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"RICH ENOUGH TO BE GENEROUS"

II Corinthians 9:6-15

Text: "Now he who provides seed for sowing and bread for food will provide the seed for you to sow; he will multiply it and swell the harvest of your benevolence, and you will always be rich enough to be generous."  
II Corinthians 9:10-11 (N. E. B.)

This morning I want to talk about the most sensitive nerve in the human body--the pocketbook nerve. About this time of the year I begin to wonder what I'm doing in the ministry. It isn't that I mind talking about money, but when the pledge cards are all in and I find out how little some people are giving, I am always disappointed and disillusioned. It reminds me of the story of the policeman who was riding in an ambulance that was taking a man to the hospital. The man was in very bad shape. He had several broken bones, he was skinned and bruised and bleeding all over. The policeman asked him some questions for his report and the poor man could hardly speak through broken teeth and bleeding lips. "What is your occupation?" asked the policeman. "I am an ex-steeplejack." came the painful answer. The policeman asked, "When did you decide to quit being a steeplejack?" The man spit out a broken tooth and replied, "About half-way down." Well, that's the way I feel each year about half-way through the financial drive!

But let me make it clear I am not ashamed to talk about money. What I am ashamed of is how some of us Christians respond to what the Bible has to say about money. Did you know that Jesus talked more about money than any other subject? Why do you suppose that is so? Perhaps it is because how a man feels about his money is a key to who and what he really is. Money is simply a man's talents and abilities and intelligence translated into some tangible form of value. Your money is you crystalized into a particular form. So how you spend your money is exactly the way you spend yourself. That's why Jesus talked so much about money.

So, let's talk about money! First, let's talk about how much to give. St. Paul talked a lot about money, too. He said, "Remember: sparse sowings; sparse reaping; sow bountifully, and you will reap bountifully." Isn't that a fundamental fact of life? Isn't it rather fundamental that we get out of something only in proportion to what we put into it? Take, for example, going to college. The person who majors in fraternity and minors in rioting--the one who spends little time on his books, who consistently cuts classes, who devotes his energies to extra-curricular activities--he is the one who will come out of college with a very inferior education. But the young person who truly invests himself, his energies and his talents in his education--who reads and studies and conscientiously works at doing a good job as a student--he is the one who will graduate with something to show for his four years. And this is true in any field of endeavor. It is true in business, in medicine, in law, in science--and it is most of all true in the Christian religion.

You get out of the Christian faith exactly in proportion to what you put in. If you do not attend church school, if you habitually miss services of worship, if you do not give generously to the church, if you do not study your Bible and pray daily, then your religion isn't going to mean much to you. You have sown sparingly and you will reap in proportion.

But look at the other side! What a profound difference it makes in the life of an individual and in the family when one sows with a lavish, bountiful hand. Listen to this statement and as I read it, try to guess who might have said it. It is the picture of sowing lavishly the things of the spirit. "The picture of the family circle, the father, mother and children sitting together reading the Bible, is a scene of inspiring beauty. There the word of God is at work, molding character, lighting the path of good, inspiring deeds of service. Religion has a vital meaning, touching every aspect of life. God is there in the home, working through purposeful lives to create his kingdom." If you guessed some preacher said that, you are wrong! It was J. Edgar Hoover, Chief of the FBI.

So how much should you give? You should give bountifully--lavishly. And nowhere in the Bible is less than a tithe mentioned. You get back in proportion to what you give. It is a fact of life. It is a fact of religion.

But Paul not only tells us how much to give, he also tells us the way to give. Listen to what he has to say, "There should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver." When St. Paul says there should be no reluctance in giving, the Greek literally means that there should be no grief. Does it grieve you to give? Is it with sorrow--out of a sense of necessity--out of a grudging, grieving heart--that we give? You know, we hear so much about poverty today. But the problem of poverty is not one merely of economics. The problem of poverty is also one of love, one of joy. I had the opportunity several months ago to visit with Dr. Billy Graham in his home. Dr. Graham tells the story of one of the richest men in this country who asked to visit with him. This great financial giant broke into tears as they talked and said, "I am so very unhappy." The poorest people in the world are the ones who are poor in love. The greatest tragedy in the world today is the tragedy of poverty-stricken hearts.

I want to know if this congregation is rich. I don't mean rich in money because by the standards of the rest of the world you are rich in money and material things. What I really want to know about you is whether or not you are rich in joy, rich in love, rich in compassion, rich in concern for others. Yes, the problem of poverty in our day is also a problem of joy--a problem of the attitude of the human heart.

Earlier I made some crack about not liking to be a minister at this time of the year. I want you to know I didn't mean that for a second! There is no greater joy in the world than to have a share in bringing men and women and young people into a saving knowledge of Jesus that changes their lives. There is no greater joy or blessing than to be a part of a great congregation that is making a dynamic



witness to Jesus that causes men to get their lives changed and our world to get itself changed. And if you and I cannot find great joy in doing that, we are of all people most poverty-stricken.

So the Bible tells us to give lavishly and to give joyfully. The third thing the Bible tells us about giving is that by giving we are enabled to give more. Isn't that an amazing promise? Yet, there it is--right there in scripture! Can we believe what the Bible says? Can we take scripture seriously? If we can, listen to what St. Paul says, "And it is in God's power to provide you richly with every good gift; thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation, with enough and to spare for every good cause." And then, just as a sort of spiritual cherry on top of the whipped cream, St. Paul adds, "And you will always be rich enough to be generous."

Are you rich enough to be generous? I suspect none of us thinks he is that rich! But there it is in the Bible. If we give bountifully, generously, the Bible promises us that God will multiply it and swell the harvest of our benevolence until we will always be rich enough to be generous. That is a promise from the Bible and God stands behind that promise.

Do you know, from a human standpoint I can't afford to give to the church? I never did have enough money just to give a large part of it away. It's like the seminary president who was telling the graduating seniors as they got ready to go out into the world and take pastorates, "Boys," he said, "Remember that a great preacher is one who is poor and humble." An elder from a church who attended the ceremony congratulated the seminary president on his advice and said, "Mr. President, if the seminary will send the boys out humble, we'll take care of the rest of it. So, humanly speaking I have never been able to afford the luxury of giving to the church. But Elizabeth and I have always believed the promise of the Bible. We have always believed that if we gave, the Lord would multiply our giving and we would be able to give more. As a result, we have always been rich enough to be generous. We began our married life together by tithing. We both came from very modest--if not to say poor--homes. That meant we had to work our way through college and seminary. Yet, we always practiced the tithe. Ten percent of all we had went to the Lord and we were always rich enough to be generous. The promises of the Lord are true--they are good--they can be relied upon. Put God to the test in your life and you will see if it works for you.

Let me conclude with a word about Central Presbyterian Church. Today you stand on the threshold of a great opportunity. Because of a number of things that have happened recently, the eyes of our entire General Assembly are on us. We have a chance, a glorious opportunity, to witness to our Assembly as to what we think a church should be. We have the chance to give leadership, to give direction, to our whole denomination. But even more importantly, because we are who and what we are, we have a chance to give a great evangelical ministry to this city. Quite frankly, I know of no church any where with more potential in terms of leadership, of ability, and yes, of money.

To whom much is given, much is required. As a congregation let it be said of Central Presbyterian that she gave of herself for men---that she gave of herself for her denomination, for her city, for the men for whom Jesus came to die. Let it be written of us that in a time of great challenge, in a time of great need, that we gave lavishly and bountifully, that we gave with hearts filled with joy, and that in the very process of giving we found ourselves always rich enough to be generous.

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