

Sermon for Sunday, November 9, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO 63105

"RICH ENOUGH TO BE GENEROUS"

II Corinthian 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

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 sowing, 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 panty raids--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 an 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 a tithe to the Lord, 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 this summer 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 you really believe the Bible is true, that it is the word of God, that it can be relied on, listen to what it says: "And it is in God's power to provide richly with every good gift (that means God is going to bless you in proportion to your giving); thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation (now, that means your own needs will always be met), with enough and to spare for every good cause." Isn't that marvelous? If we tithe, if we give according to God's plan and God's will for us, there are some incredible

promises. He promises there will be provided richly every good gift--we will always have ample to meet every situation--and we will still have some spare--some left over--for every good cause! And just to be sure we understand what he is saying, St. Paul adds, "and you will always be rich enough to be generous."

Well, that is simply astounding! If we believe the Bible--if God can be trusted to keep his word--the best way to be rich enough to be generous is to give.

Are you rich enough to be generous? Are you rich enough to tithe? Are you rich enough to have some spare left over to do good things besides? If you are not, do you understand why not? It is because we are not claiming God's promise. He says if we give, we'll have all we need and some extra left over.

Are you having a hard time making ends meet or making your money stretch as far as you need for it to stretch? Could it be because you are not giving enough away? You see, if you don't give according to God's plan and God's will, you are cheating yourself. Your money just won't go as far. But the person who trusts God, who believes God's word, and who does what God tells him, makes an incredible discovery. He discovers all his needs are met and he has some left over for other good things.

Now, if you don't believe that, talk to someone who tithes. He will tell you quickly that tithing is one of the greatest blessings in his life. First, he is being obedient to God's command and that blesses him. It makes him feel good because he is doing God's will. Second, because he is trying to be in God's will, it often changes how he spends his money and what he spends it on. The old things that used to take so much of his money don't interest him any more. Third, God is keeping his promise in that person's life. God is protecting him, shielding him, blessing him. He will tell you that he couldn't afford to pay for all the things God is protecting him from now. He will tell you it would be a bad investment, a poor management, not to tithe because in the long run, it is the cheapest thing he can do.

You know God is using Central in a special and unique way here in St. Louis. He is using us to make a mighty witness for Jesus. I suppose most of us are aware that Central is one of the best known churches in the city because of how God is using our ministry to touch lives and change lives for Jesus. But is that all God wants to do? I think not. I think God wants Central to start a Christian High School so that young people will have an alternative to the secular humanism taught in our public schools. I think God wants to expand our facilities to accommodate the people he is bringing here. I think God wants us to do more in the inner city, to send more missionaries, to build more new churches. I think God wants us to expand our ministry by television. I believe there are many new and exciting ministries God wants us to get involved in.

Are we rich enough for that? Are we rich enough to be that generous? Well, the Bible says we are. The Bible says that if you and I as individuals and if this church as a congregation, gives according to God's plan, he will meet every need we have and we will still have some spare--some left over to do good. Yes, that's God's promise--we will be rich enough to be generous.

Let me ask you two questions. First, do you believe the Bible? If you do, the Bible tells you to tithe. Second, do you believe that God is no liar and that he keeps his promises? If you do, then you will be rich enough to be generous.