

A Good Measure, Pressed Down

Psalm 119:33-40, et al.

INTRODUCTION

This is, of course, our Stewardship Month here at Grace, a month where we give special attention to the responsibility of all followers of Jesus to give generously of their time, talent and treasure. And I'm sure that all the posters and bulletins and narthex PowerPoint slides have clued you in to the fact that this year's stewardship theme is "Beyond Measure," based on Luke 6:37-38 (our Gospel reading for this day – and throughout this month).

Last week Pastor Powell's sermon was focused on that Luke text, and he reminded us all that God has faithfully been generous to this congregation in the past – to the tune of more than \$7.5 million dollars since the economy tanked in September 2008 – a number that reflected on the dollars that have passed through the Grace checking account, and not even attempting to attach a monetary value to the more than 250,000 man hours that been invested in the teaching, hospitality, outreach and care ministries of this congregation or the tons and tons of donated items that come in for St. John's Food Pantry, the Open Hands Free Store, Christmas food baskets, Operation Christmas Child or any of the other numerous opportunities this church provides for your generosity – including the items being brought in this weekend for those impacted by Hurricane Harvey. Nor does it include the more-than-\$100,00 this congregation has gifted to area outreach ministries through the use of our Community Center and the ministry of Table of Grace.

Let me remind you of those verses:

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
(Luke 6:37-38)

I want us to think about the phrase "A good measure, pressed down." And in doing so, I want to make two observations.

Observation #1: Being pressed down means there is room for more

That's a truth we know well.

- When you are making chocolate chip cookies, you press down the brown sugar so you have room to add a little bit more
- When you are packing for vacation, you press down on the lid of the suitcase so you can cram in a little bit more
- I once pushed the bottom out of a dresser drawer because I wanted that one last T-shirt to fit in.

God so wants to fill our lives with His blessings that so we are always trying to make room for more ... but just like that dresser drawer there is a limit to what we can hold. So if God wants to put something else in, then something has to come out.

That's where the pressing takes place. If I want a measuring cup full of brown sugar, I have to press the air out. If I want to experience more of God's blessing, then I need to get rid of all the other stuff that is NOT pleasing God.

In the Romans passage, Paul lists a number of them:

*Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.
(Romans 13:13)*

All those things – and many more things like those – take up space in our lives – space that could instead be occupied by the blessings of God.

King David gets that point in the Psalm for today when he writes:

*Direct me in the path of your commands,
for there I find delight.
Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain.
Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word. (Psalm 119:35-37)*

He says “God, turn my eyes away from worthless things and turn my heart toward everything that is you ... for there I find delight.”

We are all filled with something. It may not be good stuff, but we are all full. You and I both know people who:

- Are so full of hate there is no room for love
- Are so full of business there is no room for rest
- Are so full of themselves there is no room for others

And so it is with the blessings of God. You can be so full of things that do not please God there is no room for the blessings of God to fill your life. And it is in those blessings that you find delight.

Observation #2: Your capacity is NOT the goal.

You see, this whole stewardship thing isn't about my measuring cup being full of brown sugar and then skimming something off the top to put in the offering plate each week. It is about realizing that I've have been filled with God's blessings – that I have more than I need – and so therefore I want to give back to God so that others can experience what I am experiencing ... all the while knowing that when I do ... God will keep pouring out His blessings on me.

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Luke 6:38)

God wants you to be filled and He wants you to be overflowing because people who are truly filled always give the abundance back to God. And that's how His purpose on earth is accomplished ... as people give generously and sacrificially out of the blessings of time, talent and treasure God has given to them.

But where people get off track is when they start to see their own capacity as the end goal.

We easily settle into a comfortable week-by-week church existence, where we are happy to be together and to help each other grow as disciples of Christ, and (to be frank) are reasonably content with the world around us continuing on its way to hell...

The consequences of that are serious.

William Booth – the founder of the Salvation Army – composed a short summary of a vision he had while traveling by train across the Australian countryside. The whole piece (about 4 pages) is worth reading in full, but here is a short taste of it:

I saw a dark and stormy ocean. Over it the black clouds hung heavily, through them every now and then vivid winds moaned, and the waves rose and foamed, towered and broke, only to rise and foam, tower and break again.

In that ocean I thought I saw myriads of poor human beings plunging and floating, shouting and shrieking, cursing and struggling and drowning; and as they cursed and screamed they rose and shrieked again, and then some sank to rise no more.

And I saw out of this dark angry ocean, a mighty rock that rose up with its summit towering high above the black clouds that overhung the stormy sea. And all around the base of this great rock I saw a vast platform. Onto this platform, I saw with delight a number of the poor struggling, drowning wretches continually climbing out of the angry ocean. And I saw that a few of those who were already safe on the platform were helping the poor creatures still in the angry waters to reach the place of safety.

On looking more closely I found a number of those who had been rescued, industriously working and scheming by ladders, ropes, boats and other means more effective, to deliver the poor strugglers out of the sea. Here and there were some who actually jumped into the water, regardless of the consequences in their passion to "rescue the perishing." And I hardly know which gladdened me the most – the sight of the poor drowning people climbing onto the rocks reaching a place of safety or the devotion and self-sacrifice of those whose whole being was wrapped up in the effort for their deliverance.

As I looked on, I saw that the occupants of that platform were quite a mixed company. That is, they were divided into different "sets" or classes, and they occupied themselves with different pleasures and employments. But only a very few of them seemed to make it their business to get the people out of the sea.

Now this astonishing unconcern could not have been the result of ignorance or lack of knowledge, because they lived right there in full sight of it all and even talked about it sometimes. Many even went regularly to hear lectures and sermons in which the awful state of these poor drowning creatures was described.

But what puzzled me most was the fact that though all of them had been rescued at one time or another from the ocean, nearly everyone seemed to have forgotten all about it. Anyway, it seemed the memory of its darkness and danger no longer troubled them at all. And what seemed equally strange and perplexing to me was that these people did not even seem to have any care – that is any agonizing care – about the poor perishing ones who were struggling and drowning right before their very eyes ... many of whom were their own husbands and wives, brothers and sisters and even their own children.

(excerpted from A Vision of the Lost by William Booth)

Application

When this church – or any church that is faithfully pursuing the call of the Great Commission – asks you to give of your time, your talent or your treasure, it is not because the needs of the organization are so great. It is because there are people still drowning in the ocean, still trapped in the darkness, still trying to find a place of safety and refuge.

It is easy and almost natural to keep focusing on your own needs, on making sure that your own needs are met and that your own life is comfortable. It is easy to say "I'll just keep doing what I've always done" and let someone else worry about it. It is easy to think that the blessings of God are all about me.

But here is the truth you need to hear this morning: God blesses you beyond measure so that you can bless others out of what you have received, and to do so "beyond measure." None of us are the end game. We are all channels through which God's blessings flow.

You are being challenged this month to think about how you use all the resources God has given you: your time, your talents, your treasure. And on the last Sunday of this month – two weeks from today – you will be asked to make a commitment about what you will do with the blessings God has given. It's not a commitment to the church, but a commitment to God.

That is a serious decision – one that requires time to pray and to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus ... Speak to us all. Turn our hearts toward you. Amen.