

As I was getting into my truck the other day, I became immediately aware of how measuring things is part of our everyday life. Looking at my watch, I measured how much time I had to complete the trip ahead. I had checked the amount of money in my wallet, measuring my funds for the expected, and unexpected, expenses. I looked at the fuel gauge, measuring the amount of fuel in my tank. I pushed the trip-tic button, resetting it to zero, so as to measure the actual mileage I was about to travel. All this attention to measurement occurred before I had even left the driveway.

Today we begin a 4-Sunday sermon and adult Sunday school series we've titled '*Beyond Measure*', leading us to and preparing us for Consecration Sunday on September 24th. Our theme verses are Luke 6:37-38/ '*Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*' Jesus illuminates the clear connection between how we measure our giving and the measurement of what we receive.

This truth was powerfully conveyed in the 2000 box office movie Pay It Forward. A Social Studies teacher challenges his 7th graders to think of something to change the world for the better. A student named Trevor decides to pay a favor, not in response or in return for a favor, but to pay it forward to another. What a remarkable, and biblical I might add, concept. On 8/31 I heard the CEO of Home Depot, in response to hurricane Harvey, say: 'We help these people and God will help us. Nothing more.' This truth is clearly conveyed in the verse our world labels 'The Golden Rule': '*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*' We are to treat others as we, ourselves, wish to be treated... '*Forgive us our trespasses **as** we forgive those who trespass against us.*' 'Forgive' means to give before or first. The measurement we use to determine our giving is the measurement used to determine how much we will receive.

Consider the three statements made about the 'good measure' in these verses. The measure shall be '*pressed down*'. That's the imagery I like when ordering a double-dip ice cream cone, 'press down' into the cone the ice cream I selected! '*Shaken together*' refers to compacting measurement, as when 'shaking' a measurement of flour or sugar in a recipe. The third

statement is *'running over'*, offering us an image of abundance as we read in the 23rd Psalm: *'Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.'* Whatever it is that we are giving, it will be pressed down, shaken together, and running over in order for our giving to reach its greatest measured potential.

I once read of a small village known for growing large potatoes. One year, the village farmers decided to keep the largest potatoes for their personal consumption, leaving the much smaller remaining potatoes for future planting. The outcome of this tragic decision is foreseeable. Although the farmers were able to enjoy the largest potatoes from their fields, planting the much smaller potatoes ultimately yielded a harvest of only much smaller potatoes. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *'Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.'* [2 Cor. 9:6]

Writing this sermon, I was transported back in my memory to September 2008. Jill and I were on vacation, preparing to return home and celebrate Consecration Sunday here at Grace. The day before we were to come home, the bottom fell out of the stock market. This catastrophic event decimated many a financial portfolio and the seismic impact can still be felt across our nation and community 9 years later. I wondered: *'Should we cancel Consecration Sunday until our nation's financial situation stabilizes or turns around?'* It seemed an unwise, even insensitive, time to speak with our congregation about financial commitments for the coming year. We faithfully forged ahead and, did you know, our congregation has contributed \$7, 617, 806 from 2009 through August 23, 2017? We trusted God and God, again, proved trust-worthy! We gave and we have, richly received!

God has been, for these past 101+ years, so very generous to this congregation. As I have learned and read about the first 70 years of our ministry and as I have, now, shared with you in these most recent 30 years of ministry, Grace has consistently been a generous congregation. We give with no expectation of receiving, yet God continues to bless us year after year! We offer leadership and exemplary stewardship locally, within our Southwest Ohio Mission District and Ohio Mission Region, and throughout our North American Lutheran Church. Grace Lutheran Church does not ask how little we can do, but, rather, how much will God enable us to do!

As we begin, together, to ever-more-intentionally pray about the measure we will use in discerning our level of giving in 2018, let us remember '*the measure we use will be measured back to us.*' God's Word, not mine! Amen.