

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 23, 2016

“The Burden of our Blessings.”

Luke 12:48b

This text, drawn from the parable that teaches us to be ever vigilant and ready for the Lord’s coming, also establishes the principles of accountability and responsibility. Blessings are not to be treated as unappreciated, mismanaged, mistreated, trampled upon, and abused. We are not to do with our blessings whatever we please—as if they are ours. Blessings are given to us to manage, for the Bible teaches us that God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, holds us accountable for the way we treat the blessings that heaven’s grace bestows upon our lives. However we’re blessed—whether with riches, education, a good job, a good companion, children, the exuberance of youth, long life, friends or people who love us, health, a creative mind, a particular talent or talents, or spirituality—we must manage our blessings wisely and handle them well. For one day we shall give an account for the way we have treated or mistreated our blessings. As our text informs us, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” Luke 12:48b

Our text not only reminds us of the burden for accountability and responsibility of our blessings; I believe it also teaches us about God’s expectations of our giving. God is extremely fair; God expects us to give only what we have. If we have much, God expects much, and if we have little, God expects a fair measure of devotion from our little. God doesn’t expect a person who doesn’t have a job or who is on public assistance to give the same amount as the person whose income is in the six-figure bracket. God does not expect a child on an allowance to give the same amount as his or her working parent. But God does expect that child to be taught to give something from what he or she has.

God is unlike anyone else to whom we will ever give. When we run up our light bill, we pay what the utility company demands. The utility company doesn’t look at how much we have and say to us, “Give as you’ve been blessed. If you have much, then pay much, or if you have little, then donate little.” The utility company says, “This is what you owe; pay for what you used. Pay it or out go your lights.” The same principle applies at the grocery store. You pay for what you get. Both the wealthy and those on welfare who shop in the same store will pay the same price.

However, God requires only that we be fair and give as we have been blessed. “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” Most of us understand and accept this principle. Yet as fair as it is, it rises or falls on our understanding of one word—much. Most of us will gladly testify that God is good—all the time—and that we have been blessed—until it comes to the issue of our giving. At this point we stop talking about how much we’ve been blessed and start crying about how much we owe on our bills. We say, “True, I’ve been blessed but—I’ve got a mortgage, my rent keeps going up, I have a child in school, I am supporting several of my family members, I am on fixed income, I’m not well and my medicine is so expensive, the cost of living keeps going up, I’ve got to get a new car, the prices in the grocery store keep going up every time I go there. True, I’ve been blessed, but when I look at all I have to pay out, I don’t have much left. True, from everyone to whom much is given, much is required, but that doesn’t apply to me. That applies to my employer, or Doctor so-n-so, Mr. John Doe, the widow whose husband left her well-off. If I had their money, I would give much more, but when I look at my obligations, I don’t have much to give.”

One of the things we forget about is that the term much is relative. What is little to us looks like much to a lot of other people. If you don’t believe me, ask the victims of hurricane Matthew, the victims of the Beulah fire, or the people who were flooded by the recent hurricane, they have lost everything. Ask the people who have to stand in line to buy the necessities of life. Ask the people of Guatemala or Haiti what they think about our little. Many of our parents and grandparents would have thought that heaven had come on earth if they had some of our little.

We all know the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” We have all criticized this young man for letting his riches block his way to the Kingdom. And some of us have self-righteously declared that if we had had his riches, our response would be different. Hear the word of the Lord: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”

A small boy asked his father for money for the church offering. The father said he had a penny in change. (That’s our first mistake, parents. We give our children dollars for movies and pizzas, and only change for the church offering and Sunday School). But the boy replied, “I can’t just put a penny in the collection plate.” The father asked, “Why not?” The boy said, “You don’t want me to look cheap to the Lord, do you?” When we look at how we’ve been blessed—food that goes bad in our refrigerators, clothes that hang in our closets that we don’t wear, can’t wear and won’t give away—how does what we put in the church offering look to the Lord? When we look at the money we smoke up, drink up, and use

to make ourselves look better and smell better; when we look at the money we invest in the lottery, at the racetrack, and the little things we just enjoy doing and having—in spite of all our other bills—how does what we put in the plate look to the Lord?

When we think about the fact that every day God gives us health and strength to do whatever we need to do that day; every day in ways that we can't number God shows his steadfast love, his amazing grace, and his never-failing protection of us, how does what we give at church look to the Lord? God so loved us that God gave his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, for our redemption. God so loved him that he hung him high and stretched him wide that we might be saved—that upon his return to glory we would have a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to guide us into the truth and empower us for living. We celebrate the fact that death no longer has dominion over us and that nothing can keep us in bondage unless we allow it. In Christ we have cleansing for our sins, peace in the midst of trouble, joy on our journey, the resurrection from the dead, and hope of eternal glory. When we think about all of this, how does what we give in church look to the Lord?

Giving, however, is not simply a matter of money. We've been blessed and we have received more than material blessings. The parable in Matthew 18:25-35 teaches us of the unforgiving servant. If we have been forgiven, then we ought to give some forgiveness to others. If God has been patient with us, so we ought to be patient with others. We ought not be so quick to give up on people and send them to hell. I'm so glad that God who is perfect is not as quick to send people to hell. I know sometimes when we see people who have wronged us, we ask ourselves why we should forgive them...we forgive because we have been forgiven. The Bible is full of Scripture about forgiveness. Isaiah 1:18, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." We forgive because we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sinned against us..." We forgive because Jesus prayed on our behalf, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." "From everyone to whom much is given, much will be required."

Giving is also a matter of service. We ought to be willing to serve however we can, wherever we can, whenever we can—with a glad mind and a willing spirit. Nobody ought to have to beg us to serve; we ought to do it for the simple reason that God is good—all the time. If there is something we can do, we shouldn't wait to be asked. If we are never recognized or our names are never called—that's all right. We're not serving for recognition or for future rewards; we're serving because God has been good and still is good—all the time. How we feel about the preacher isn't important. What is important is that we render service to God. That's why we're singing in the choir, ushering at the door, taking abuse as a leader, making sacrifice as a member, meeting late at night on special projects, cooking in the kitchen, volunteering in the office, taking time with the young, caring for the sick, strengthening the faith of the discouraged because God has been good to us. Let us freely give of our time, talents and our monetary blessings. God loves a joyful giver and God's Word tells us, "From everyone to whom much had been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."