

## *BOOMERANG BLESSINGS*

**Luke 6:37-38**

**October 25, 2009**

**21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

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Funny isn't it? The best gifts we get are the gifts we give.

I remember when I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade and our assignment was to make a wastebasket for our mothers for Christmas. It was one of those fail-safe things you couldn't mess up. So, with crayons in hand I drew my best for her—sort of like “The Little Drummer Boy” playing his best for baby Jesus—except my gift was a trash can and it was for Mom, not Jesus. I can still picture the finished product under the tree. It was a proud moment to think I'd made it for my mom.

Mom, being Mom, of course, swooned over the thing I'd topped off with a bow. That she held onto the darn thing many years, even through several family moves, only increased my sense of satisfaction. It was one of those gifts that kept on giving—to me, if not to her.

Dad was no different. He hung onto the incredibly ugly black ceramic ashtray I made him in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Arts & Crafts. My older sister for many years kept the record case I'd made for her LP's in Wood Shop out of poplar, sand paper, some finishing nails and a coping saw to ornament the edges. The effort I put into these gifts didn't mean a thing. All I remember

is the joy it gave me making them and giving them away. Funny, how the best gifts we get are the gifts we give out of love.

Jesus must have known this. *“Give and it will be given you,”* he says. *“Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”* I think it was his way of saying: the best gifts we get are the gifts we give.

Course, you and I know the temptation. The mercenary, money-grubber, inside me, goes, “Hey! If I’m generous with my money, God’s gonna give me more money back.” It’s the false promise preachers of the prosperity gospel feed their congregations all the time. It’s why the Joel Osteens and Houston Lakewood Churches of the world fill whole stadiums with people hoping God is on the take!

But this isn’t what Jesus means! He isn’t offering some 1<sup>st</sup> century “Get Rich Quick Scheme” to apply to the 21<sup>st</sup> century! He’s saying the joy of a life of faith in God is just around the corner once people start putting God at the center of everything, including their financial lives!

Where is this most likely to happen?

I think the church; because the place I started learning the joy of giving was in, of all places, CHURCH! It was the late 1970’s. Meadlawn Christian Church of Indianapolis where I was serving at the time had invited former Deputy General Minister and President of our denomination, Dr.

George Earle Owen, to lead our first Week of Preaching. Dr. Owen was a commanding Christian and a commanding preacher.

The first sermon he gave he preached on tithing, meaning 10% of our income. I'd never really heard of tithing, except in a few passages in the Old Testament, and I didn't really know what it is. Yet, in that sermon he raised the bar far above what I was used to. I'd had a relative ask me, "Why would you give anything to the church when you're working for them?" So, I gave to church, though not very generously. That morning Dr. Owen lifted me off my seat and lifted my soul. Right then and there, for the first time, René and I began to tithe, to give 10% of what we made to the church. It became a part of our budget along with our first mortgage and our increased expenses with our then toddler first child, Erica.

Though we weren't the only ones affected. Another family did the same thing. The husband, Dick, had had no church background at all. Then God and giving became central to his faith. Later he often spoke of how the best gifts you get are the gifts you give. He meant it materially as well as spiritually!

Alas! Somewhere along the way, I lost some of that early enthusiasm; mind you, never to return to the meager levels of giving I'd started out in ministry with. We've nearly always given at least 5 or 6% to God through the church since then. But somewhere I lost the joy of giving.

Then something happened earlier this year, when the joy of giving returned to me like a boomerang, catching me off guard. Over the past several years René and I decided to increase our pledge \$50 per month, including the years our son Peter was in college, which, incidentally, we are still paying off. René and I decided to do this in this church, because we've always believed in this church and the values it stands for and acts on.

Finally, last year, after several years of increasing our pledge, we reached our first major goal of the tithe: 10% of our after-tax income, or about \$750/month. Not that this makes us better than anyone else. God loves everybody the same, no matter what they give. But reaching our first goal we decided this year to add another \$50.00/month or \$800/month.

Still, what really gives us joy is when we added yet another \$50.00 each month through various kinds of gifts to this church, but especially the Blessing Gift which has really been a boomerang blessing to us, for sure!

Well, guess what? I can't remember a year when giving has been so much fun. It's become like an addiction, the rush is so strong. In fact, though I've always wanted to be generous, the reality is I'm really pretty stingy. I once dated a girl in college who even said I was "cheap," and she was right! But now, for the first time in my life—even more than back in the late '70's and '80's—giving has become fun. It took a while—really a very long time—but I think I finally got it; though it's more correct to say,

“it got me.” I finally figured out that the best gifts we get are the ones we give.

I also realized something else. I realized that, until we learn that the best gifts we get are the gifts we give, life seems pretty mundane, even miserable. Though the happiest people I know are always the most generous, it just hadn't dawned on me until this year, the reason they're so happy is because they know: *“The measure you give is the measure you get back.”* They know the best gifts we get are the gifts we give.

And you know something else? The joy of giving isn't about the money. In fact, it's never been about money. It's about making a difference in people's lives, of leading people to the joy of the Christian life. It's about using the time, the talent, the energy, and yes, the money, God has given us during this short time we're here on earth to be God's church, and to be hope for the hopeless and hope for the world.

But it's only as we give that the joy of giving comes back to us, like a boomerang. It's only as we learn to give generously, body, mind, and soul that we discover the joy Jesus promises. It's because Jesus understood: *“The measure you give is the measure you get back.”*

Because, you see, it's really true: the best gifts we get are the gifts we give. Praise the Lord!