

# Sermon

## “A Fair Balance”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, June 27, 2021

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

**Prayer for Illumination:** (modeled on a prayer by Walter Brueggemann 2001)

**You are the God of generosity — giving and giving and giving more.**

- † **Giving the warm sunlight of Summer**
- † **Giving rain to soothe the parched earth**
- † **Giving us time for work & play & rest**
- † **Giving manna in the wildernesses of our pilgrimage**
- † **Giving water and honey from the rock (Psalm 81:16)**
- † **And for all your giving you do not begrudge us for our many persistent needs.**

**You give, Lord, and we take.**

- † **Taking our daily bread as you provide it**
- † **Taking in glad wonder and joy at the generativity of creation.**
- † **Taking to satisfy our desires in due season (Psalms 104 & 145)**

**And then taking more . . .**

- † **Taking more than we need**
- † **Taking in order to consume more than is good for us**
- † **Taking in nervous acquisitiveness**

† **Taking because we are driven to compete with our neighbors — exploiting the weak and doing so without shame because we imagine that we are just getting what is owed to us.**

**Meet us this day, generous Lord. Meet us in this place and with these inconvenient words about a world in which everyone has enough because no one has more than they need. Convict us, as your Word always seems to do, and offer to us an alternative to the rat-race in which we are participating and which is killing us.**

**Move us to follow in your generous impulses so that there is a fair balance between our wealth and the needs of others.**

**In the name of the one who came and gave everything to us — giving himself, his life, his wisdom, his friendship — even our Lord, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

*Ex. 16:13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. 18 But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. 19 And Moses said to them, “Let*

*no one leave any of it over until morning.” 20 But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. 21 Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.*

*Ex. 16:22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’” 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none.”*

*Ex. 16:27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. 28 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? 29 See! The LORD has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.*

*2Cor. 8:1 We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; 2 for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, 4 begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints — 5 and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, 6 so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. 7 Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.*

*2Cor. 8:8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the generous*

*act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 15 As it is written,*

*“The one who had much did not have too much,  
and the one who had little did not have too little.”*

- I. As I prepared today’s message I was put in mind of Halloween - 1977.**
  - A. When I had to go to Tae Kwon Do lesson before I could go out trick or treating.**
  - B. Parents of some of my friends suggested that they each give me a handful of their candy to supplement my own meager haul.**
    - 1. With what sullen disdain they gazed at me as they grudgingly put some of their candy in my pillow-case.**
    - 2. With what red-faced humiliation did I accept their parsimonious charity.**

- II. I'd like you to think for a moment about how resistant we are to the idea of "fair balance."**
- A. Particularly in the area of economics.**
  - B. A person's wallet is the last part of them to come to faith, and it is the first part of them to leave the faith whenever they are uncomfortable or irritable about something at church.**
    - 1. BTW, this is not really the point of this message . . . but *of course* churches are fallible institutions which make partial decisions.**
    - 2. Of course your session and/or your pastors will arrive at opinions about which a reasonable person might hold a different view.**
    - 3. Your gifts to God are, in the end, not about the church, or its leadership, or about the positions it holds.**
    - 4. Your gifts to God are given for reasons that are *internal to you*.**
      - a. You give because you know how much God has done for you and you want to acknowledge that.**

*[People] will never worship God with a sincere heart, or be roused to fear and obey [God] with sufficient zeal, until they properly understand how much they are indebted to [God's] mercy. - John Calvin*

**III. This Summer's devotions**

- A. We will be exploring the idea of generosity.**
- B. Our church has already been the recipient of generous gifts.**
  - 1. The continued giving during COVID.**

- C. If you have ever had a generous person in your life you know how incredibly powerful their generosity can be.**
- 1. My mother was a teacher - she never earned much.**
    - a. But she lived modestly**
    - b. Tithed her church through both the joyful and times of church-fights**
    - c. Remembered her church and her favorite charities in her will — and still left gifts to her children!**
  - 2. I was and remain in awe of her easy generosity.**
  - 3. When she gave it was without strings attached.**
  - 4. After I left home her church had a new, young, and impish pastor who was well-loved.**
    - a. “I upped my pledge — up yours!”**

**IV. In today’s passages of scripture we have two very important scriptural moments regarding generosity.**

- A. Indeed, Paul, writing to the church at Corinth alludes to the other passage!**
- B. First the moment in Exodus — they are panicked**
  - 1. Manna falls**
- C. Moses gives careful instructions**
  - 1. Gathering is limited according to your *need***
    - a. An omer a piece**
  - 2. No hoarding!**
    - a. No keeping some for tomorrow!**
    - b. It’ll be foul, breed worms, and melt**

3. **There is a provision for keeping sabbath**
  - a. **on sixth day gather twice as much.**

**D. Of course we did not obey Moses**

1. **Some gathered far more than was their share  
it became foul, bred worms, and melted away.**

**E. The narrator of Exodus observes:**

*The Israelites [collected the manna], some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.*

**“What is this magic?!?!?”**

**F. For forty years (14,600 days!) they lived according to this set-up.**

1. **God provides what is needed**
2. **You can have what you need and no more**
3. **Life is lived in a clearly dependent way — we wait for and accept from God the provisions we need to make it.**

**G. It almost seems like God was trying to teach us something....**

**V. Paul in his appeal for financial gifts to help the poor in Jerusalem cites this very passage.**

- A. **He urges the Corinthians to be generous**
- B. **He tells them that he isn't trying to impose pressure upon them in order to provide relief to the poor**
- C. **He is simply trying to maintain a “fair balance” between their wealth and other's need.**

**VI. On that Halloween night more than 40 years ago**

- A. I can say with absolute certainty that if I had been asked to share my candy with another child**
  - 1. I would have been just as**
    - a. sullen**
    - b. grudging**
    - c. miserly & close-fisted as they were.**
- B. It saddens me to know the truth of that**
- C. I was raised better than that. My mother was modeling generosity to me.**
  - 1. So did Moses & God**
  - 2. So does the apostle Paul**
- D. Letting go of our stingy attitudes is not easy to do.**

**VII. But when we take to heart the life and death of Jesus we can be reminded of why we aspire to do better.**

*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*



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