

“The Gift that Keeps on Giving”

2 Corinthians 9:10-15

**First Presbyterian Church
November 22, 2020**

After the arrival of his firstborn child, British writer Rudyard Kipling gave one of his manuscripts to the nurse who cared for his child. He told her, “Someday if you are in need of money, you may be able to sell it at a handsome price.” A few years later, she sold the manuscript and lived in comfort for the rest of her life. He’d given her his original copy of *The Jungle Book*.¹

That is an example of creating (writing a manuscript), sowing (giving it away), and harvesting (seeing it bear fruit). Creating, sowing and harvesting are what the Apostle Paul is talking about in his Second Letter to the Corinthians. Paul says, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

Of course, it is God who supplies the seed and we who scatter it and harvest it, turning the grain into bread for food. Comparing this to our giving, Paul assures us that this is not a one-time thing, it’s not closed loop that, once it’s run its course, it’s done.

Just like when Kipling created the manuscript, gave it to the nurse, and watched it generate blessings for her and her loved ones for generations to come, so also, the blessings we receive from God – when we give them away or scatter them like seeds – those blessings continue to generate blessing after blessing, generation after generation. Or as Paul says, God multiplies “your seed for sowing and increases the harvest of your righteousness.”

Today is Pledge Sunday, when we dedicate – in the sight of God – our contributions to the church for 2021. Every dollar you pledge is a blessing, a blessing received from God, given by you, and multiplied through the ministry of this church, generation after generation. It’s the gift that keeps on giving, both to others and to you the giver.

Paul says, “You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us. For the rendering of this ministry,” says Paul, “not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.”

It’s important to note here that it is not only financial contributions that overflow with thanksgiving to God, but also the contribution of your time and talents on behalf of First Church, and on behalf of anyplace or anyone ministering to God’s people.

¹ According to Isaac Asimov in his Book of Facts.

What sort of thanksgivings to God are we talking about here? Well, there is the thanksgiving of those who gather for worship, both online and in-person when it's so permitted. There is the thanksgiving of those receiving *Advent in a Box*, so that everyone can celebrate the season as a beloved part of this church family, even though we can't gather here on Sundays for awhile.

The thanksgivings to God that come through this church also includes those of our veterans, who received a to-go meal and care package provided by our LOGOS ministry in honor of their service. They include the thanksgivings of the Dulcimer Club, Cub Pack, YoungLife ministry, TOPS weight-loss group and the Lions Club, who use Westminster Hall to bless the lives of others, who in turn, also give thanks to God, thanks to God "for your righteousness," as Paul put it, for your support of First Church.

These thanksgivings also include the LOGOS children, youth and volunteers who engage in Bible study, the Tuxis confirmation class, worship skills, and Christian fellowship. They include our Homebound members, community members, and local service agencies, who feel and cherish the outreach of First Church, including our Thanksgiving food drive this year, in lieu of the community meal we usually provide.

And there is the thanksgiving of each of us, and our families, who know how much First Church has meant to us over the years and means to us today, along with the hope and promise it provides us for tomorrow. Yes, giving to the church is a generational act of faithfulness that overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Paul goes on to assure us, saying, "Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ..." I struggled with his word choice here – "the testing of this ministry." I have no doubt that Paul is saying our faith in God and obedience to the Lord is actually tested through the act of giving. And yet, there's that "glorifying God" part that Paul mentions, saying, "Through the testing of this ministry, you glorify God..."

Now, that speaks to actions and results, as in, take a test and get the results. It's a sure thing! Tests give results, and in this case the result is that God is glorified. The point is you glorify God through your participation at First Church, whether that participation is through your financial support, musical gifts, volunteering, or whatever way you give and contribute.

Finally, Paul says "you glorify God ... by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others" – those ministry recipients of ours – "while they long for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given to you."

In other words, because God has showered you with a Spirit of giving others long for you and pray for you.

This church is a blessing to others, and they know it, they long for it, and they return thanks to God for it, for you. God is blessed and glorified through your participation in this church.

There's an old Jewish legend about the origin of praising God. After God created the world, God asked the angels what they thought of it all. "Only one thing lacking," they said. "It is the sound of praise to the Creator." So, says the legend, God created music, the voice of birds, the whispering wind, the murmuring ocean, and planted melody in the hearts of men and women."²

"Through the testing of this ministry" – the fruits of our ministry – Paul assures us that we "are music to God's ears through our obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ." What Paul is referring to when he says "... the confession of the gospel of Christ" is our proclamation in word and deed "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (15:3-4)." That's from 1 Corinthians 15 – the life, death and resurrection of the Lord.

So we see that this confession of the gospel of Christ through our words and deeds brings us back to the act of creating, sowing and harvesting. If Christ's life, death and resurrection is not the greatest example of providing the seeds of faith, sowing them in the earth, and reaping the harvest of their blessing, I don't know what is.

God created the world, God sent Jesus to sow the seeds of love and redemption and abundance through our faithful ministries, and in turn, God blesses our lives and the lives of others through the fruit – the harvest – of Christ's presence in our hearts and in our world, and through the ministry it produces through us. Amen.

² https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustration_search.asp?item_topic_id=1279

Pastoral Prayer

God of steadfast love and faithfulness, we your people kneel at the altar. Some of us come offering praise, for your power has delivered us from a time of trial. Some of us come with desperate pleas for your strength and protection as we face life's dark valleys.

But in all things, both good and bad, we come with thanksgiving, for all you have done and all you will do for us.

We pray for those who grieve. Let them know and feel the Lord's tender embrace. We ask your protection and spirit of wellness and renewal for those who are ill. And we praise you for those who have recovered and been reunited with family.

Thank you, Lord, for hearing our prayers. Keep us all safe this Thanksgiving, and go ahead of us now to provide for our safe return to in-person worship, Sunday school, LOGOS and other gatherings.

We know that your steadfast love surrounds us, blesses us, and strengthens us for your purpose. It is in that love that we pray, using the words that Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**