

A Sermon By Rev. Jim Hickman
Corona United Methodist Church
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Celebration of the Successful Gift of
Giving Campaign

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2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Toward the end of Paul's Second Letter to the Church in Corinth he reminds his readers of a collection he is taking for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He begins chapter 9 by saying:

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you...were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action (2 Corinthians 9:1-2)

Paul was writing them to both encourage them in their giving and to celebrate what they had already done. In doing so he has given us—Christians through the centuries—one of the best statements we have about the value of Christian giving. It is the passage we heard read a few minutes ago. In it he

- states a general principle of giving: we reap what we sow, so sow generously.
- He says each should give what they have decided to give—we should not be forced to give what someone else thinks we should give.
- And he gives one of those classic lines of scripture: God loves a cheerful giver. Or as the *Today's English Version* translates it: God loves those who give gladly.

Then Paul pauses and elaborates upon these points. In verse 12 he returns to the larger point and adds an additional reason to give:

- Thanks will be given to God for what you did.

In celebrating our successful Gift of Giving Campaign I think we ought to take a look at the first and last points Paul makes.

- The general principle: we reap what we sow
- Thanks will be given to God for what you did.

The first, about reaping what we sow is a principle found throughout the Old Testament and in Jesus' teachings. I think we are familiar with it. But I want to look at in a slightly different way than Paul was: I think the success of the Gift of Giving Campaign is a reaping what was sowed before.

We went looking for \$200,000 to repay the debt we owe members for the Money they loaned to us and to pay down some of the principle on the mortgage. We went looking for \$200,000 and we have been promised \$249,262 to be paid Over three years.

We reaped more than we expected.

I think the success was a gift from the One who has watched this church be faithful over all of its years. For over 120 years this church has

- Provided programs and worship for people to grow spiritually

- It has had programs for children, youth and adults, Music programs, VBSs, Young Adult groups, fellowship groups
- It has provided for the poor and needing in Corona/Norco and Southern California and the world.
- It has sought to be faithful in the people and resources entrusted to it.

Oh, lets not be maudlin—it has not been perfect. *But it has been faithful.*

Let me tell you about my experience of this faithfulness. I came here four years ago. At that point the church had been trying to move for twelve years—trying to move so the church could do its ministries more effectively in a new location in a newer building. Things looked like they might be ready to move, but they'd seen that before. Yet in their faithfulness they would try again. Dick Carlson, Russ our architect, Lamon our contractor and the committee—if you were part of that committee at any point during those years, would you stand up. Thank you. It worked! They worked! You've heard me say this before: it is a miracle to me that the work was done by consensus—I think we took only 2 or 3 votes the entire time we worked together. We were faithful. A result of that faithfulness? This building.

AND I think the campaign was part of God's blessings for that kind of faithfulness. The faithful of people over the last 15 years/over the last 123 years. We are reaping what *they* have sowed.

Now I suspect some of you are saying, "Well Jim, that is all fine and good. But the church is still not paying all of its bills. What about that?"

The pattern of sowing and reaping/faithfulness and blessing is complex—it is not a single pattern running through our lives, but a number of strands. We are faithful in some things and we reap some benefits/sometimes we do poorly and we don't find any blessing. Our live/our church are a combination of all these threads

Our general income needs work. We need to review the budge and do some cutting of our expenses. We are looking for ways of increasing our membership and income. This involves the Finance, Community Outreach, Hospitality and Trustee Committees.

And in our faithfulness some of us need hear what Paul is saying. Vss 6 & 7 is a mini sermon with points a/b/c. He moves from we reap what we sow to God loves those who give gladly.

Donna is the bill payer at our house. In our personal finances I am one of those people who would say "How can I be over drawn—I still have checks left". But some years ago we worked out a way of handle our finances that says: I give away what I receive in payment for things like weddings and funerals. And you know what, I have found out how good it is to give. How good it makes me feel to send off a check or make a contribution toward paying off the rent on our printer in the office. I think some of us need to find that joy

And Paul's other point: people will give thanks for what we do here. Doug picked up on this early on in his helping to get the campaign underway. You heard him refer to it in what he said this morning. I know he is right. I could tell you stories about people who are sitting here right now—people who give thanks that this church exists, sits here on this hill side, offers this or that program, is caring and accepting the way it is, is welcoming the way it is. I could tell you stories. But then you know the stories. I don't think there is a person sitting here this morning that isn't thankful in some way for this Church. Paul is correct,

This service that you perform [these gift you give over the months and years ahead] are not only supplying the needs of God's people, but is overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the giving you are doing, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of faith and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. (2 Corinthians 9:12 & 13 with my adjustments to the text)

Amen!