

I need to say, as I begin today, that I hope you will not be overwhelmed by my *Grandiloquence*- the way in which what I say is colorful or pompous, especially in language. You may recall that as a way of encouraging our teenagers to listen more carefully to my preaching, I have promised to insert several words chosen by them into the sermon. One hopes to do this gracefully. It is not so easy to do with a word like, ahem, *grandiloquence*.

Jesus tells a story about servants who were given money, and the choices they made about using it or hiding it. It is a complicated story, and scholars argue about how to interpret it: Is God the one who gives and takes away? But what about the ending- does this sound like Jesus? There is more in this parable than we can unpack today- but one thing is certain about this story Jesus tells:

It is a story about giving and getting

Cruel truth of hoarding: it cheats you even of what you had before.

Hoarding is not the same as saving- hoarding is something we do out of fear. It is not the same as being prudent or responsible, or planning for the future. Hoarding is something you do when you are afraid- afraid that what you have will not be enough, or afraid that you will lose it or break it, or afraid that it won't be appreciated.

Hoarding what you have been given does not help you find the meaning of your life, or protect the joy God intends you to have.

It may be that when we look at who we are and what we have, we feel small. It may be that we can see that the problems in our world are enormous, and that we are powerless to fix them- We may even feel powerless to meet all our OWN needs. And in some measure we are right:

We cannot relieve all the suffering of the world.

But every one of us can go to bed every night knowing we have relieved SOMEONE'S suffering: that we have been part of something beautiful and good, rather than burying our gifts in the ground.

And this action of giving will, in the miracle of how God has designed the world, bless US, in ways that hoarding our treasures never could. We begin by giving- **and realize we are also getting.** The action of giving not only

meets the needs of those we seek to serve, but we begin to meet a deep human need in ourselves, As well.

Italian psychologist Roberto Assagioli tells this story:

Once upon a time, in the 13th century, there were 3 stonemasons who were laboring near one another on the same enormous project.

When the first is asked what he is doing, he scowls and replies that every single day he does the same meaningless thing- over and over again he hacks away at huge pieces of stone, shaping and measuring, pounding them into chunks that are exactly the same size. It is what he did yesterday. It is what he will do tomorrow. It is what he will be wasting his life on every day until he dies. He turns away in irritation and continues his work.

The second answers the question ‘what are you doing?’ differently. He gestures at his tools as if the answer is obvious, but his face softens and he smiles as he says, “with this hammer and chisel I am caring for my family. By cutting and shaping this stone into bricks, I am feeding my wife and keeping a roof over the head of my baby. I am making a life for the people I love most in the world.”

The third stonemason, when he is asked what he is doing looks up from his tools with pride. “Ah!” he says, “you will hardly believe me if I tell you! With this ordinary hammer and chisel, I am making walls and arches that will tower over this town! I am building soaring spaces that will make people catch their breath, that will lift human hearts and astonish visitors for a thousand years after I am dead and gone!
I am sharing in God’s work.

I am Building a cathedral.”

Here is what we know: **That giving and blessing others is what we were made for.** It is a blessing.

Aidan: Not long ago, we had our annual Mariner’s Hoe-Down, and we ate and visited and laughed and some of us even danced in our beautifully decorated Fellowship Hall.

Later, someone was having a conversation about the event with 6-year old Aidan Morris. Aidan became indignant over a disagreement about the name of the event. His conversation partner suggested it was a **Hoe**-down, but Aidan objected vehemently, after all, what kind of a ridiculous name is that? What’s a Hoe anyway? Our party, he insisted, is a “Home-Down”, because

this is our big church FAMILY, and we go DOWN to church to see them. A Home-Down.

For Aidan, this event has meaning beyond the food and the fun that the Mariners provide for. **It is about Family, and Love and Belonging- it is about Home. There's no place like Home.**

Giving and Getting are not just about what is in your bank account, or what you do each day, or what entertains you.

It is about meaning.

Think of the most precious and blessed moments of your life-

I would be willing to bet that they included at least as much giving as getting.

And this may be the great learning, the great gift of our time. Just as the Greatest Generation had a task they undertook 60 years ago that changed the world, a new threat has arisen, and with it an opportunity. Never before in human history has any culture had the ability that we have to use so much of the earth's resources, to have so much more than we need- and in doing so to learn that More is not always Better, that hoarding does not heal. Perhaps it is our task to learn, and eventually to teach, that one can live well WITHOUT consuming more than their share, and that one can be astonishingly affluent and consuming constantly- while being internally impoverished.

As we contend with global environmental issues and a global financial crisis, we have the opportunity to seek God in an entirely new landscape, to ask what Jesus would do in a situation like the one we find ourselves in.

This is an unprecedented era. And the Christian church has great treasures to offer as we navigate this uncharted territory. We know something about giving and getting.

We may be leaders in discovering solutions to living sustainably on the planet God has entrusted to our care.

The sense of having enough-Or never having enough

Real Simple Magazine- 50 pairs of shoes. I wear 8 of them.

In this culture of acquisitiveness and affluence, of greed and weariness, We have grown numb to much of what is sweetest and best about life.

We have internalized the lie that more is better, that getting is better than giving, that the one who dies with the most toys wins.

You might say that we consume plenty, but it has lost its zip and zing and savor- it is no longer *zingiberaceous*-

At that point, no amount of consumption or affluence can fill the emptiness.

It is as if we get over-saturated, and though we keep looking and buying, acquiring more of the same or hoarding what we have will not heal us.

There is a special kind of root that grows on plants that live in wetlands or swamps called a *Pneumatophore* – It grows ABOVE The ground (and above the water line) to draw in oxygen and air in an environment of ‘too much of a good thing’ - what are your pneumatophores? **How are you reaching out for what you need: a chance to give as well as to get**, a chance to contribute and to bless and to redeem?

Katrina: I love church days. (what do you love about them?) You get to learn about God, and wear beautiful clothes.

Don't put on 50 pairs of shoes... put on hope, put on faith and love. Put on the beautiful clothes that help you learn about the love of God.

Put on the attitude that you are building, brick by brick, a monument to the love of God, where children learn about Love and Home-down in a scary world,
where

We do this for OUR OWN Sake!

Part of what we do when we take on the challenge of Stewardship, **we do for our own sake**. We do it because there is joy and spiritual freedom in giving that simply does not come with getting. We do it because we want our lives to be about something more than cutting endless numbers of identical blocks- our lives are meant to be about something holy and beautiful, something shared, something magnificent, something bigger than ourselves.

All we have is given to us as blessing

and we were made, hard-wired, to be bless others. Giving is one of life's deepest joys.

For no reason that is clear to me, **the God we believe in believes in US**, and has entrusted us with all we need to make the world what it was intended to be.

And when people believe they have ‘nothing left to give, nothing to contribute’, that is when they become despondent and want to die.

No- **giving is a blessing, and percentage giving is what the Bible holds up as the goal** and the expectation. You want a greater sense of financial freedom, of joy, try tithing. Money back guarantee.. if you tithe, and at the end of the year you don't feel like it was worth every penny, like you were blessed in the doing of it.... Then we are not supposed to have your money and we will return it to you!

Jesus, in his grandiloquence, tells us a story **about servants who were given money, and the choices they made about using it or hiding it.** Perhaps we recognize them.

And Paul gives us an invitation to live as children of the light, to let our giving and our getting be isometric, strengthening each other- so that we might be the blessings we were created to be.

Take these gifts, dear loving God, and know that they come from our hands and our hearts.

With these ordinary tools, with the talents you have given us, Help us to build a cathedral, O Lord. Help us to create a place here in San Bernardino that uplifts and shelters and makes space for your love to be known and experienced by our church family and by all who are your children. And help us to know that we are part of creating soaring structures that circle the globe as we join our gifts with others to bless the world you created and love.