

“The Fullest Measure”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

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Scripture Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A 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.”

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I read a rather interesting comment on today's Gospel passage as I began to prepare this week's sermon. The writer is a Presbyterian minister in Texas. His biographical sketch says he is the Sr. Minister in a large congregation, but he is better known for "being a husband, father, author, blogger, and ping-pong champion who is pretty good at sidewalk chalk," so I guessed his comments on the text would be down to earth – more 'real people' and less academic. His comments were about this section of Luke's Gospel being a part of a greater piece. He included Jesus' calling of the first disciples, their new title, his gathering of his hearers on a level playing field, and then begins to preach with eloquence. Jesus talks about blessings and woes and turns the people's understanding pretty much upside down. He writes: "After a few blessings and woes, Jesus starts talking about how we are to love our enemies (v. 27) and turn our other cheek (v. 29) and give to everyone who begs from us (v. 30). Jesus throws out a few examples of folks showing some basic love or simple acts of goodness but then implies that those mean very little because "even sinners" do those (vv. 32-34). Aren't we still considered sinners?! Finally, Jesus ends this section with a double negative and double affirmation which seem to be about as close to karma as Christianity gets (vv. 37-38). Give, get. Forgive, forgiven. Don't judge or condemn so that you don't get judged or condemned. One could be tempted to reduce this entire section down to one of those mathematical word equations in which what you *do to others = done to you.*"¹

In essence, this preacher points out that this moment of Jesus' teaching is a part of a greater story. The Lord's primary way of getting his point across is to use parables – stories, and illustrations that speak to people's own stories. Preachers still use this method of teaching the Scriptures today. Stories speak far more loudly and deeply than theories and doctrinal premises. Stories, as we well know, make the teachings understandable, relatable, real.

Every week I record Evening Reading and Prayer videos and post them on Tuesdays and Thursdays. These short services contain Scripture readings and prayers, and a devotional kind of reading to help us focus on the peace and assurance of Christ as we settle for the evening. Sometimes the readings are from nighttime devotionals, sometimes they come from daily readings I receive. Sometimes I share from books on my shelf – reflections from legendary preachers and theologians. I have one book that is a little different from the rest – 99 Earth-Shattering Events Linked to the Bible (Worthy Publishing, Museum of the Bible Inc. 2017). Some of the stories told are powerful, like how Martin Luther King Jr. based his civil rights movement in Scripture, and Mother Teresa founded her mission. Some are explanations of historical events, like Joan of Arc leading France in battle and Leonardo da Vinci painting the last supper. Some are the foundational beliefs that have prompted scientific breakthroughs, like Francis Bacon developing scientific method and Louis Pasteur inventing life-saving vaccinations.

¹ <https://pres-outlook.org/2022/02/7th-sunday-after-epiphany-february-20-2022/>

And some are surprising connections, like Marconi's development of the radio telegraph system, and Neil Armstrong walking on the moon.

As I thought about today's Gospel reading, and that Texan minister's reflections on it being a part of a greater story, I began leafing through my book of earth-shattering events. There were several that spoke to the premise of showing and receiving mercy, giving and being given to, and loving our enemies. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For me, the final verse in today's text sums it up beautifully: *the measure you give will be the measure you get back*.

When I was a little girl I received an Easy Bake oven. I must have been about 9 years old. My friend down the street had received one before me, so had had some experience with baking the yummy little cakes from the recipe book. One day I took my oven to her house and we got down to work. I looked to her for tips about using the little oven. She told me, with great confidence, that I didn't have to level the measure of flour and baking soda, that it could be heaping because the cake would rise better. It didn't sound right, given how my mother had been teaching me to bake, but I trusted her experience and added all of my dry ingredients in a heaping measure, rather than leveling and packing them down. Well, the cake rose more, for sure, too much. It got stuck in the oven. When I finally got it out, part of it was left behind in the inner parts of the oven. I was so upset, not because of the cake, which actually tasted pretty good, but because I didn't know how I was going to tell my mother I had ruined the oven. So, I called home and told her, expecting to be in serious trouble for being irresponsible. Nope. Mom said she would clean out the oven and it would be fine, not to be upset. I so did not see that reaction coming! Her full measure of grace and understanding overcame my full measure of panic, and my way beyond full measure of flour, and it all turned out well. When I returned home with my cake-encrusted oven, we worked together to clean it up, and Mom reinforced her teaching about measuring carefully when baking, with that same full measure of grace and understanding. It's amazing what one can learn from an Easy Bake Oven experience... it helped me be a more understanding parent for my own kids, I hope.

Of greater and global significance, people throughout history have given a full measure and their efforts have changed the world. Getting back to my earth-shattering events book, one of the stories I read was about Nelson Mandela negotiating and end of Apartheid. Given February is Black History Month, I thought it would be fitting to share this information about Mandela's courage in working for justice for the rights of his people. The full, overflowing measure he gave has been returned in the fullest measure from God.

"South Africa experienced a dark period when the nation embraced apartheid. During this time, thousands of black citizens suffered severe injustice. Because the government was at the root of apartheid change could only come about by a grassroots effort. Nelson Mandela knew that fighting for the rights of South Africans was the right thing to do. He also understood that it would come at great personal expense.

Nelson Mandela's courage and fortitude in the face of a seemingly hopeless situation was inspired by the accounts of Jesus in the Bible. According to the Gospels, Jesus sacrificed himself

to save people, and he expected his followers to willingly give their lives for the sake of others... Mandela sought to prepare himself to fulfill the task of sacrificing his freedom for the justice of the South African people by way of biblical instruction. While Mandela was not outspoken about his religious beliefs, he relied heavily on the teachings of the Bible to get him through the many trials he faced.

The decision to stand up for justice cost Mandela his freedom for many years; he was thrown into prison for his activism. However, Mandela's stand did eventually pay off, and he was ultimately able to secure freedom for many people."²

That story reminds us of how much of a difference we can make by giving our fullest measure for the needs of others. We don't do it to help ourselves, we do it to make a positive difference, to bring justice, to make someone else's life better. And we do it in the name and example of Jesus, who gave a fuller measure than you or I can imagine. He didn't do it for himself, he did it for the world of his own day, and the generations that would follow, forever.

Love your enemies. Help others without expecting anything in return. Bless and pray for those who hurt you. Do to others as you would have them do to you. These commands are hard enough to digest and follow on their own, but when they are joined with the assurance that giving the fullest measure we can of these things will bring a full measure back to us, we wonder just what we're missing. Being good to those who hurt me doesn't necessarily make them do good back to me. Giving of myself doesn't always result in feeling good about it. Loving those with whom I always struggle is not easy, and isn't often met with love in return. I know we aren't to expect anything in return. But when we give a full measure, and are promised a full measure back, it's a bit hard to reconcile.

Unless we don't recognize the full measure. A Godly return isn't the same as a worldly return. But God provides the ultimate example of what is meant by these words.

We don't always give the fullest measure of ourselves to God. It's easy to skip a day or two, or three, or four, of prayer and Bible reading. It's easy to blame God more quickly than we thank God. It's easy to cry for God's help in the stormy weather and ignore him when skies are calm and bright. It's easy to give God praise at Christmas and Easter, and on Sunday morning, but people can be somewhat less committed to worship during the rest of the year, or the week. No, we don't always give the fullest measure of ourselves to God. But God always gives the fullest measure of himself to us. God gave the fullest measure to us in Jesus – his ministry, his death and resurrection, his promise of forgiveness and life. We certainly are not able, in our human frailty, to give a full measure in return. But that doesn't have a bearing on God's blessing us. As we heard in the text from 1 Corinthians today, we are perishable, what God gives is imperishable. We are physical, what God gives is spiritual. We are weak, what God gives is power. We sin, God forgives. No matter how small a measure we may give to God, God gives a full measure to his people.

² Quoted from [99 Earth-Shattering Events Linked to the Bible](#). Museum of the Bible Books, Washington DC, Worthy Publishing Group, 2017, Pg. 108.

This assurance of God's blessings ought to inspire us to give a fuller measure of ourselves, to God and to God's vulnerable earth and people. In being disciples, followers and students of Jesus, we must make the best effort we can to fulfill his commands. We must make our best efforts to love those we find hard to love, bless those who hurt us, to do good with no expectation of anything in return, because as disciples of Jesus we are commissioned to teach his way, in word and in deed. In giving a full measure of ourselves for the sake of others, we model our Lord who gave the fullest measure of himself for us. Can we do that? I hope we will at least try. Amen.