

Sowing and Reaping

II Cor 9:6-12

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I have been so excited to share with you this morning because this wisdom we hear from Paul in his letter to the Corinthians is so very central to the life of faith. The whole text is a thank you letter and an encouragement to keep on keeping on. Paul reminds his brothers and sisters that what you put into something spiritually is often what manifests itself later – if not for you, then for someone else. If you invest a little of your heart and energy that's generally the proportion that results. It almost reflects the law of physics in terms of action and reaction – spiritual action of heart/mind actually puts into play new possibilities.

So it is not only what we do; it is our state of mind as we do it. Giving reluctantly or grudgingly actually sets certain negative forces into motion. Giving joyfully and selflessly creates something else.

I have known both kinds of persons in my life.

I have known people who give not out of joy but only out of obligation. For them everything is a chore, a transaction. Nothing feels light or joyful. Everything is seen in terms of scarcity: Is there enough?

I have also known the spiritually free who offer their time, talent and money with abandon, excited for what may come of their generosity. They are sowing with great expectations.

Churches tend to fall into those two categories as well. Some churches are always overly cautious, protecting their interests, always wondering if there is enough to go around. They easily fall into a siege mentality and circle the wagons. They become risk-averse.

Other churches come to know that the more you give, the more you invest, the more you open your doors, the more you rise to the occasion of some great mission or vision the more you receive. They thrive on sowing without knowing. They trust God. And they are the happy congregations.

I want to share three lessons I've learned about sowing and reaping and the Christian life:

1. **Sowing as a lifestyle.** Sharing our time, talent and treasure should become so “normal” that we don't notice it. As Jesus said about generosity in the Sermon on the Mount, “Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” It should feel right and good because that's the way you are giving. Whether you are living on a fixed income or pulling down six figures, your God portion should become so normal, feel so good, that you often don't notice it. That's when you know it's become a part of your lifestyle, when your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing, when you give not because it's extraordinary but because that's the way you live, that's how you find your joy. *Sowing as a lifestyle.*
2. **Sowing together.** The whole is always greater than the sum of the parts.

So often we witness “overflowing” taking place when many hearts, minds and hands joining together to create a tapestry that is beautiful for God. We accomplish things together we never could alone. That's why we have a congregational mission. For example, Broadway has become a new partner in education with the Columbia Public Schools and our particular partnership is with the new early childhood center. By marshalling all the varied gifts in the congregation we will become a potent partner alongside an essential institution in our community. Find out where God is at work, join in and go do it. *Sowing together.*

3. **Sowing without knowing.** Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness to the edge of the Promised Land but he did not go in himself. He lived for a vision, gave himself to it, and followed his God. But in the end his gift was for more than his own gratification.

We often plant seeds we will never personally see grow into full harvest. And that is the most selfless kind of giving; giving without knowing or seeing the outcome.

For example, many of us have worked on a solution beyond Room at the Inn, a permanent center that could serve as a 365 days a year combination emergency shelter and resource center. We often have traveled by little more than faith. Now it appears that after so much time the doors to that possibility are beginning to open. What I am keenly aware of is that some of the people who worked the longest and hardest on this project will not be here when it comes into fruition. But they did not let that deter them. Their vision and commitment was for more than their own gratification. They were Moses standing on the mountain looking toward the Promised Land without knowing that they will enter it. Sometimes we sow the seeds without seeing the future result. And that is a sign of true faith. *Sowing without knowing.*

A particular African tribe has an annual feast and festival to commemorate the goodness of the earth and the harvest. And as a part of the festival all of the families in all of the villages bring a portion palm wine to add to the great vat of palm wine for the festival.

One time the head of one family said to himself, "Sharing my palm wine with the whole tribe seems too great a sacrifice. Since so many will be contributing, surely no one will notice if I just bring a jug of water and pour that into the vat." And that is what he did. When he arrived at the ceremony and the families and villages were pouring their wine into the vat he came forward and quietly poured in his jug of water. He then returned to the circle of his village.

When it came time for the ceremony to begin they poured wine for everyone to share and at the same moment following the words of welcome, they all drank from their cups.

There was a gasp from everyone in the tribe: “Water!” There was only water. Every village and family had assumed that no one would notice if they brought water instead of wine and everyone poured in water.

“The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”