

Year C, Epiphany 7
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To draw us in closer to the conversation with Jesus, Luke uses a lot of financial language. Even long ago, money seemed to be the hook for so much of our lives.

Jesus uses the term "credit" to help us review how it is we love one another. A love that presupposes a return is what financial guru Clark Howard calls "enlightened self-interest". That's not exactly the kind of divine love that Jesus is teaching. The divine love of Jesus' description is one that goes forth without expectation of return. It is freely given, and not in a stingy way but instead in a generous way, a heaping portion kind of way. He said, "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" (Luke 6:37-38).

Once again Jesus takes something from ordinary life and turns it into a memorable tag. Think back to the clothing of Jesus' day. There weren't a lot of pants. Instead everyone wore what to us would appear like winter pajamas. There was a soft undergarment much like an extra-long t-shirt over which was worn a heavier material for everyday wear. When purchasing grains in a market, there were no plastic bags or take-away containers in which to pour the grain. Instead, a person would take the outer garment and hold it like a giant bowl, into which would be poured the contents of the merchants' measuring cup. A stingy merchant would try to sell you a cup's worth of grain without delivering a full cup, sort of the inverse of the butcher with his thumb on the scale. Jesus' tells us that the way to deliver our produce of love and forgiveness is to be exceedingly generous, to take that cup and tamp it down to get as much as possible in and then to pour more on and not knock off anything over the lip but to include that too. That product would be poured into one's lap and then wrapped and carried home to the permanent container.

It's a wonderful image and has transformative power because it is so brilliantly tied into daily life. When using daily connections, Jesus was only copying the model of the law. People sometimes complain about the minutia of the law as detailed in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, but it is genius in that even the smallest of daily duties were intended to hold the covenant with God in front of our eyes. Covenant wasn't something one acknowledged weekly or even daily and left it; instead it was all day every day. How do we get to such a point when we have the capacity to be compassionate all the time? How do we become good stewards of a compassion so intense that it can be described as a heaping, over-flowing portion?

First, we have to get off the score keeping circuit. Whether we admit it or not, we often have our own "enemies list" and behave accordingly. One thing is sure, people on the enemies list will not be receiving our forgiveness or love. Instead, we conserve forgiveness and love and dole those out to the ones we love and who will duly return that love.

Unfortunately, this runs exactly counter to Jesus' teaching. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those

who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 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. 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. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Of all people who might have been justified in keeping score, it was Joseph. Joseph was certainly somewhat of a brat as described in Genesis. As his father’s favorite son, the brothers grew tired of the spoiled kid who could do no wrong, so they faked his death and sold him into slavery. Yet, God’s plans for Joseph allow him to repeatedly overcome obstacles. As he matures Joseph is no longer the bratty kid but instead a competent man who is continually entrusted with authority. By the time he encounters his brothers he is head administrator of the Egyptian Kingdom. Rather than think himself in power because of his own brilliance, Joseph recognizes he has been placed in his position simply through the grace of God, and that the prosperity of Joseph is not simply for Joseph to live comfortably. It is instead meant as a vehicle for his extended family. In saving Joseph, God saves dozens if not hundreds of others directly and countless people down the line.

How many families have we seen that are crippled because a sibling rivalry has stunted the relationship to the point that one or both parties are permanently embittered? Sadly they often pass this poison on to their children and anyone else who will listen to how it is they have been wronged.

Joseph did not spend his life telling people how he had been wronged but instead of how he had been saved by God. While Joseph did not physically die when his brothers faked his death, we can say with certainty that he died to his old self in order to live anew. Had he remained the bratty favored one, he would have never made it in his new circumstances.

So it is with us who claim to desire generosity of compassion. It cannot happen in our present bodies. We must as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians (15:35-58), die to our present bodies and live in a different way, “What you sow does not come to live unless it dies.” Such is a love that expects nothing in return. Such is the love of God in Jesus, who died for us. The overflowing compassion of God as demonstrated in and through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the ultimately display of, “A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over” (Luke 6:37-38). *Amen.*