

"Hilarious Giving"
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Matthew 13:45-46

You ever get restless in church?

Do you?

Some of you are nodding your heads.

I used to get restless...as a child

First Presbyterian Church Greensboro....Dr. Redhead, droning on and on....he was a preacher of note....but not to a 6 year old.

I was restless. I'd wish something exciting would happen.

I'd look up at the spiked gothic lights hung on long chains, swaying ever so slightly...

Wonder if any of them has ever fallen?

Who would that light over there fall on if it fell?

Oh look there's a light over me...I better move over....God might make a light fall on me for thinking something like that....

I'd start sliding over....get my ear lobe thumped.

So I'd take the bulletin....with the picture of the church on the cover....and the pencil from the pew rack..and I'd draw fighter/bombers strafing and bombing the church.

Wouldn't a psychiatrist have a field day with that.

I used to get restless in church....still do...

When things seem to drag....I get antsy.

I guess that's why we always get out on time.

One of you told me a joke about church, dragging on....

It's a good joke.

A little girl was restless.

The sermon droning on and on.

She leaned over to her momma...

"Momma, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?"

There it is....the "m" word.

Money.

Oh boy!! The money sermon!

Was it Evelyn who asked the question "who likes to talk about money?"

I couldn't see from back there, but I bet there was a lot of hands up.

Not really.

You're more likely to hear a Presbyterian say, "Hey, it's my turn to sit on the front pew," or "I just love it when we sing songs I've never heard" than you are to hear someone say..."YES!! YES!! It's the MONEY SERMON!

But I put my hand up that day.

I love to talk about money.

It's so important.

"Jesus talked much about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions."

God, obviously, has his hand up. He loves to talk about money.

Why? It's so important.

Money is God's chief rival for our affection.

Money is so powerful, it vies for our worship;
It tempts us to raise it up on our heart's throne.

And when we do, it brings heartache.

What's the first commandment?

"You shall have no other gods before me, besides me, in place of me...I'm a jealous God....won't stand for it!

Jesus said it this way, "You can't serve God and money."

He said, "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also."

IT works the other way, too...

"Where your heart is....there's your treasure."

What you love most....that's your god.

You restless yet?

It's the money sermon.

I could throw in the tired old joke about never seeing a Brinks truck following a hearse....or pockets in a burial shroud..

I could apply a little pressure...."If you don't give, we're not going to be able to keep the lights on and the church air conditioner is going to cease conditioning."

It's the money sermon....you've heard and heard it, and heard it....so you know it like the back of your hand.

"Give, give, give till it hurts.."

"Give, give, give till it helps..."

No, I want to challenge you today to give till you laugh....till it's hilarious.

That's our text this morning,

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has

decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The Greek word Paul uses for "cheerful" is hilaron, a root that renders us our word hilarious...happy happy happy.

It was the preacher at Greensboro First Presbyterian Church who first taught me, as a child the hilarity of giving....

Not the one droning on in the pulpit, but the one who's their preacher now... Sid Batts, now First Pres. Greensboro's pastor, my beloved cousin.

Long before either one of us put on a robe he taught me.

He taught me after a summer pickup baseball game in the cow pasture beneath the Macclesfield NC water tank.

Sid grew up there in Macclesfield. I was a city boy from Wilson.

Those Macclesfield boys were tough.

They said, dem and dis and dat, and dem air'....

They were tough....why before the game I watched the pitcher, Edgar, open a drink bottle with his teeth.

I'd never seen anything like that before.

We spread out among the cow chips..it was so hot that you could see the heat rising from the ground in waves...

I was in right field....and you know what that means....I was little..the littlest one....six maybe...and a city boy to boot...put him in right field.

And when I came to bat, I had to face Edgar.

And Edgar had another talent, besides opening a bottle with his teeth....he could snap off a wicked curve ball.

And follow it up with a Bob Gibson fastball.

Strike one.... strike two....trembling...scared to death..and then cousin Sid, bigger, older, stepped in to take my third strike....a negotiated deal with the opposition....

I stood ready to run...when Sid whacked it....and hollered, "Run Bobby, run!"

I ran and ran....and then back out in the field swatting flies and trying to shag flies that made it to right field.

Chanted, "Um batta, um batta, um batta.. SWING!"
It was fun...for a while.

Then I was restless. And parched.

The game went on and on....

Till at last we were finished....or so I thought.
But someone channeled their inner Ernie Banks, "Let's play two!"

Back out in the field....
My "um batta, um batta batta, SWING" gave out and became, a whining
"Hooow muuuch loonger???"

Then the game was over and just like that, we headed to the store.

Didn't have a name...far as I know.

It was the store.....
Screen door with a spring....whaaah/

Smelled sweet inside, a bouquet with hints of Wonder Bread, motor oil,
and Bit o Honey.

And there was a drink cooler....

A box...

You lifted up the lid...and there in rows were bottles of grape and orange
nehi, Yoowho, a new drink, called Mt. Dew, (tickled yer' innards!) and the
old standby....Pepsi.....in the 16 ounce bottle.

You paid your dime, and pulled out a bottle from clanking metal...

And the symphony began.....boys opening up drinks on the box's
opener...."Psst....click" Psst...click...the caps collected beneath.

For everybody but me.

I didn't have a dime to my name.

I looked down at my feet and wanted to cry.

Till backing up in front of me, was the future preacher at First Pres.
Greensboro...backing up, holding up his hand behind him so no one
would see....that his hand held a dime.

A precious dime, for which he had sweated, cutting grass.

Quicker than you can say, "Psst...click" I turned that 16 ounce Pepsi up
and poured it down my parched throat.....till all that was left was a burp.

Sid smiled.

"Look at you.....You want another one?"

"Uh hum."

You tell the truth when you're a child...
Today I'd say, "Oh, no, no, no....I'm fine."

Psst...click.....

"Look ever'body....look at him turn dat thang up....and dat's his second
one!"

Everybody looked and laughed...which made me laugh, and you know
what happens when you laugh while you're drinking Pepsi? Pepsi came
out of my nose....which turned the laughter hilarious.

We walked out of that store...my bare chest covered in sticky Pepsi....

I looked up to Sid....looked up at him...

His face the laughing face of easy gladness....
The hilarious face of giving.

A little voice deep inside me said, "You want to be like that!" "Don't you
want to be like that?"

Too many money sermons preach "Give till it hurts!" "Give till it helps."

Better to say, "Give, till it's hilarious."

That's what Paul says in our passage today.

Don't give because you have to, you're guilted into it, because it's your duty, because you must.

Give because you may....give till you are like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas morning, as he relishes the joy of giving.

You see that picture?

Scrooge, leaning out his bedroom window on Christmas morning, cackling in delight to a boy below, who is holding the world's biggest turkey... destined, in Scrooge's newfound generosity for Bob Cratchet and Tiny Tim.

I've seen it dozens of times and still see Scrooge as Mr. Magoo....and hear Jim Bakus's gleeful voice.

This is how Dickens describes giving's hilarity:

"Ha ha ha!

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

*It **was** a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.*

``Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge to his errand boy. ``You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

He had never dreamed -- that anything -- could give him so much happiness.

Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them;

His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him."

You know what I think?

Ebenezer's laugh sounds like the laugh of a Macclesfield boy twenty cents poorer, but with a heart richer than King Midas.

If you ask me, this is why I give.

Not to do my duty, not to support the budget, not to keep the air conditioning running, but because the more I am able to give the happier I am.

Why should it be that way?

Well that's another sermon, but let me at least say this:

God made you and me to be like himself...to have the same nature as his nature....to love as he loves.

What do we know about this God?

That he looked at you, the one he'd made and saw beneath the muck a pearl of great price....and willingly gave all he had in order to make you his.

And the heavens ring with laughter on the day you are his....that's what Jesus said...Jesus, the everything that God gave for you.

Giving is the clearest sign that you are really his.

And giving is hilariously joyful because we were made for it, because we were made like him.

How infinitely and eternally sad that so many people live and die without discovering this truth.

But how wonderful that some do....

I close by telling you of one of them....

One who in a hard time took a hammer to her piggy bank.

In the aftermath of the financial collapse of 2008, Union Seminary in Richmond found itself in a challenging position.

President Brian Blount spoke to the students about some of the actions the seminary was taking to respond to the crisis.

Then, burdened, he went back to his office and prayed for a sign....a sign that God heard and would help.

The next day, the sign came.

Among the students he had addressed that previous day was a five year old girl, there with her parents, both of them students.

Unlike many that age, she had not been playing restlessly as he spoke, but listening.

And when she got home, she asked her parents if she could break open her piggy bank.....so that she could help out the seminary.

They said, "Yes."

She whacked the bank with a hammer, and \$52 in change spilled out.

The next day, when Brian Blount came into his office, he found a note from this little girl, and because her parents did not think it a good idea to cover his desk with quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies, a check for \$52...everything she had.

Overwhelmed at the answer to his prayer, the president sat at his desk for ten minutes composing himself, before he composed a letter to this 5 year old benefactor.

Then he began the letter, "Dear Vismitha."

Vismitha, it says much about you and your parents that we would learn of this giving, not from you or from them, but from the one who prayed for the sign you gave him.

I thank God for this witness.

Though it's been 7 years since you smashed your piggy bank, I think I can still hear the sound echoing across the heavens, for all eternity...a smashing hammer, every last saved bit spilled and spent in giving.

Seems like I've heard that sound before....the hammer crashing, love so amazing, so divine poured out, and God giving all.

The stunned silence in the universe after a gift like that gives way to laughter....hilarious, joyful laughter, the winning laughter of those who have learned to give.

Will heaven ring with laughter today when we come forward to give?

