

Job 38:34-41  
Luke 6:32-38  
Text: Luke 6:38

St. John's Presbyterian Church  
Devon, Pennsylvania  
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## TO BE FULL OF GOD

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into you lap;  
for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. *Luke 6:38*

It's always a thing of wonder and a source of wisdom worth pondering, that the same Jesus who left nothing tangible to the world, and who grasped nothing for himself, should become the most influential figure in history.

Jesus wrote nothing down for posterity, owned nothing, created nothing tangible that has survived more than a few years beyond the daily output of his carpenter's shop, and bequeathed nothing tangible to his family or his followers. His one borrowed garment became a poker chip, hustled over by the soldiers at the foot of the cross. And yet, he commands the adoration and allegiance of two billion people whose lives are often lifted completely out of themselves in service to him. Lives are literally poured into him. Why? Because he gave every appearance that God's goodness, wisdom and love were poured in overflowing measure into him. When God appears to overflow from a life with a super abundance, we tend to call that person a saint. These are lives that are unusually *full* of God.

Jesus talks about this overflowing fullness in terms that were vivid and obvious to his audience. He captures images that were daily occurrences. For us, these centuries later, they need a little more explanation.

If we could have strolled onto a busy marketplace to purchase household grain in Jesus' day, or even in the last century in the Middle East, a tradition seemingly as old as civilization would have confronted us. In his book, *Peasant Life in the Holy Land*, written at the turn of the nineteenth century, C. T. Wilson tells us how the measuring of corn is a process which is carried out according to a long established pattern. It is a tradition for dispensing a basic necessity of life, the purchase of wheat for bread. The vendor is always eager to demonstrate what a just and fair person he is, and so, Wilson writes:

The seller crouches on the ground with the measure between his legs. First of all he fills the measure three quarters full and gives it a good shake with a rotary motion to make the grains settle down. Then he fills the measure to the top and gives it another shake. Next he presses the corn together strongly with both hands. Finally he heaps it into a cone, tapping it carefully to press the grains together. From time to time he bores a hole in the cone and pours a few more grains into it until there is literally no more room for a single grain. In this way the purchaser is guaranteed an absolutely full measure. It cannot hold more.

The buyer would then pull up the front of the outer garment creating a deep fold and pour the measured grain in so that it would lap over the belt like a great pocket (hence our word *lap*). A woman would use her shawl as a container, tying it around her waist in front or behind.

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This, too, says Jesus, is how God’s measure will be for us. By whatever standard of generosity we set for ourselves in our giving, by that standard, and then some, will God measure into our lives. It is a fair response on God’s part, and a measure of our faith in God, for our part.

It’s a bit risky to try to characterize people’s motivations for faith, and why they come to church. But I probe the issue now and then with folks, not with any pre-conceived agenda, not looking for some *correct* answer, but because it’s important to me as a pastor to know what personal needs I’m helping to respond to. Faith springs from a multitude of soils. Many come to church because they are sustaining a faith that was planted in childhood. The church is as natural a part of life for them as bagels and cream cheese on Saturday morning, or calling the family on the phone on Sunday afternoon. Some people come out of a late blooming faith, a faith that grew out of time of disorienting crisis, when the church became a safe haven in a personal storm. Many come because they want to be better parents and good examples for their children, ensuring them the basics of faith and a solid moral grounding. They want to plant the right seeds in their families and equip them for a hostile world. They find in the church the prospect of solid ground in the midst of shifting sands. Some come out of a deep personal commitment to Jesus Christ, a personal Savior whose presence is real and vital to them. Some come seeking specific direction, hard principles from God like road signs that help them negotiate life’s journey and steer their conduct. Some come because good friendships have been discovered here, sustaining relationships that have an implicitly richer level of trust than they experience elsewhere. Some come out of an intellectual hunger, a need to have answers to life’s biggest questions. Some come out of a compelling need to serve others. Some come to escape, to find a moment of sanctuary in the midst of troubled lives, dysfunctional families, overbearing relationships. Many say that something simply feels as though it’s missing if they don’t go to church on Sunday. It just feels good to be closer to God, like crawling up into a trusted lap. All these are all real and good reasons for seeking God.

Whatever *your* personal impulse for being here, a common thread seems to run through everyone’s motivation. It’s a yearning for fulfillment that understands that its satisfaction lies beyond ourselves in some gift that God has to offer in Jesus. We want, I sense, no matter how unarticulated or even unconsciously expressed, to be more full of God—more full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.

I can lead you to all these things, says God, but should I not ask something of you in return, some sign of your faith that echoes the sacrifice you see in my Son? You tend my church from the economy of earthly things, says God, this place in which I have chosen to plant the seeds of faith—you water this soil with the things that cannot anyway purchase what the soul desires, with your gifts, your tithes, your offerings and your sacrificial time, and in recognition of your faith, and I will give back to you in still greater measure the desires of your soul. God asks only what is right and what is fair. Then blessings far larger than our imagining flow back into us when we release the gifts that are in us. In a difficult campaign, Napoleon Bonaparte was once faced with communicating to his Generals that far greater potential was within them than they ever imagined. So he called for an oak chest to be brought in that was used for transporting cannon shot. “Fill the chest with cannon shot,” he ordered the master gunner. Immediately the chain of command rippled down the line and the chest was loaded with 24 pound cannon balls.

“Full, sir!” roared the master gunner when the task was completed. The Generals nodded.

“Is it full?” asked the Emperor.

“To the brim sir,” replied the gunner, quizzically.

“Bring me three cases of small shot,” said Napoleon, and when they arrived the small round shot were poured case by case into the oak chest, rattling down among the honeycomb of spaces.

“Is it full?” asked the Emperor.

“Er...full, sir,” said the gunner, warily. The Generals hesitated to concur, staring nervously at each other.

“Bring me grape shot,” said the Emperor. And the procedure was repeated.

“Is it yet full?” asked Napoleon. There was a silence. “Bring pellet shot,” he ordered, and again the process was repeated until the lead pellets rose to the rim of the chest.

“What do you say gentlemen. Is the chest full?” An awkward silence filled the room.

“Bring black powder,” said the Emperor. And as the sides of the chest were tapped the volatile powder disappeared into its depths. “Now, then,” asked Napoleon with an air of finality. “Is it *full?*”

“It is full *now*, sir,” they all agreed, nervously eying the magazine in their midst.

“And with what power it might now empty itself,” said the Emperor.

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.”

With what resources of the soul God yet might fill us in this blessed place, and with what power we might then empty ourselves. We have not yet begun to discover what resources are in us to water the soil of the church, nor what riches God has in store for every corner of our need. In the economy of God, I never knew a life that gave generously, that did not receive far more in return, “pressed down, shaken together, running over...put into our lap.”

Whatever your motivations for coming to St. John’s, our Lord invites you to enlarge your investment in the reasons that bring you here, so that the blessings God is so eager to bestow may be heaped upon you. A blessing, unlike our material wealth, that we can take with us when we go. We know what it means to invest with the hope of a larger return. God offers no less-- indeed far more...”pressed down, shaken together, running over...”

Amen.