

“The Toilet Blessing” Gen. 12:1-3; Ez. 16:49; Lk. 12:48 11/12/17

People have lots of reasons for why they give what they give to church. Let me tell you about what motivated my own giving a few years ago. My wife and I had talked off and on about how much to increase our pledge, but we got busy, the pledge card got buried under other mail, and we never settled on a number. Pledge Sunday came and Bonnie grabbed a card from the pew rack and mistakenly wrote down a number that was a good bit higher than the range we had discussed! Oops. Later, when we realized our mistake, we weren't sure what to do. Bonnie wanted to just ask for our card back and fix it. But I was too embarrassed to do that, so we just gave the extra money that year! If anyone had looked at our card, they may have thought we were really growing in our ability to trust God in our giving, but that wasn't it at all! No! Embarrassment is what motivated most of our increase in giving that year! (Hmmm. I wonder if the Stewardship Committee could make use of that somehow on a larger scale!)

The theme of this year's Stewardship Campaign is “Blessed to Be a Blessing.” It's on the banner on your right. Those of you who took the Bethel Bible Series will recognize this as one of the major themes of the whole Bible! It began with God's Word to Abraham in Genesis 12.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3)*

God called Abraham to leave his own land, promising that God would bless him with a new land. And God also promised to make a great nation from his descendants, to make his name great, and to bless all the families of the earth through him! Those were huge promises, but Abraham trusted God, and God fulfilled them. Abraham's descendants became the Jewish nation of Israel, and one of his descendants, Jesus, was the one through whom the whole world was blessed.

This principle that God blesses us so that we can bless others is one that is found throughout the Scripture. For example, as Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, came into their promised new land, God commanded them to look after their poor and needy citizens, as well as the immigrants among them, taking care that the courts of justice did not protect the rich at the expense of the poor. In other words, they were commanded to be a blessing to those in need and without power. Unfortunately, they failed to do what God had commanded, and the

prophets called them out for this failure. For example, recall the destruction that came upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Most people think it was because of sexual sin in those places. And that was part of it, but there was more. Listen to what the prophet Ezekiel said about it. <sup>49</sup>*This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.* (Ez. 16:49) Why did God find Sodom guilty, according to Ezekiel? Because they had been richly blessed with lots of food and material prosperity, but they failed to share their blessing with others, namely the poor and needy. We are blessed so we can be a blessing to others!

Jesus continued this theme, when he told his followers to love their neighbors as themselves. And several of Jesus' parables forecast judgment for those who fail to share their material blessings with others. In Luke 12, Jesus is quoted as saying this, "*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*" (Luke 12:48) This saying assumes that we have been blessed in order to bless others, and adds the idea that if you have been blessed with a lot, a lot will be expected of you.

The rest of the New Testament continues this theme. Paul tells the church in Corinth, which has been materially blessed, to give sacrificially to

the believers in Jerusalem, who are struggling just to survive. The Corinthians have been blessed by God, so they can be a blessing to others. So, you can see that this principle is taught from the beginning to the end of the Bible. But, as we saw, God's people have often failed to live out God's intention for them. Why is that?

I think the primary reason is a failure to really trust God with our lives. Instead, it's very tempting for us to trust in money and possessions for our sense of security. Well, maybe you aren't tempted, but I know I'm tempted to put my trust there! And when we trust in our stuff, our savings, and our 401K to keep us safe and secure, we are extremely reluctant to let go of it! Giving is a spiritual matter.

When Bonnie and I were first married, we had very little, and giving was hard. I thought that it would be easier to give when we got a little older and were making more money. But then we had children, and raising them takes a lot of extra money for a lot of years! And college is expensive, too. Pretty soon we hit mid-life, and had to think about saving for retirement, and now, retirement isn't that far off, which presents its own financial challenges. I don't think there is ever a "good" or easy time to begin giving generously, to be a blessing to others with our income and wealth. It's always difficult! We're too much like the rich, young ruler who desired to follow Jesus, but trusted so much in his wealth, that he couldn't let it go.

Can you trust God to provide for your needs if you become a generous giver? I hope so!

I think the starting point to becoming generous with the blessings God has entrusted to us is to ask God to give us faith, to help us trust him so that we can let go of our money, time, and talents in order to be a blessing to others.

Many of you already give faithfully to GPC, and although we don't like to toot our own horn, God is blessing others through your giving to this church! We are passing along the faith to our children and youth, as well as some kids from the community. Our music ministry is a blessing to everyone who comes in here to worship! We give financial support and provide volunteers for numerous local missions like Gettysburg CARES, Ruth's Harvest, the Soup Kitchen, SCCAP, Habitat for Humanity, Adams Rescue, and the jail ministry. Our mission trips touch literally thousands of lives each year in Appalachia, South Carolina, Honduras, Mexico, and South Dakota.

The missionaries we support are a blessing to people in Japan, Kenya, Honduras, Mexico, Ireland, and Central Asia. All of our giving to these individuals and ministries is listed in our budget, but not everything we do is shown in the budget. And that brings me to the "toilet blessing," the title of today's sermon. For several years, three African students from

Gettysburg College regularly attended and participated in the life of our congregation. One of them was named Allan Kowala, a student from Malawi. Allan graduated and has returned to his home country, where he is trying to make a difference as he trains and energizes young people to serve others, to be a blessing to others!

A couple months ago, Allan emailed me and asked if we could support a project he was working on. He had found a small orphanage, and his youth were helping it in a variety of hands-on ways. But they needed funds for one very important project. The orphanage had no toilet, and the kids had to go out in the bush, which was not only inconvenient and unsanitary; It was not safe. He needed \$450.00 to build an outhouse. I contacted our mission committee and they quickly agreed to support this project out of our contingency fund. I wired the money to Allan, and here is the result! A brick, 2-seater outhouse! Although it may seem a little bit funny, this project will be a real blessing to kids in Malawi for years to come, and your giving made it possible! Thank you! For the toilet blessing!

And there's more. Your giving helps Lou and I bless folks closer to home. This year we've helped individuals in our congregation and community with rent money, so they wouldn't get evicted, and with electricity payments, so their power wouldn't get turned off. And, we will soon help another church in our community that is going through a hard

time. Blessed to be a blessing! I don't know about you, but I find great joy when I'm able to be a blessing to others, whether through my own efforts, or through distributing the funds that you give!

Next Sunday there will be a time in the service for each of us to bring forward our pledges for the coming year. As you prepare your pledge, I hope you'll remember God's call on us to bless others out of the blessings we have received.