

¹² "I've heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat. And in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' "

¹³ In the evening a flock of quail flew down and covered the camp. And in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. ¹⁴ When the layer of dew lifted, there on the desert surface were thin flakes, as thin as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, " What is it? " They didn't know what it was.

Moses said to them, "This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Collect as much of it as each of you can eat, one omer per person. You may collect for the number of people in your household.' " ¹⁷ The Israelites did as Moses said, some collecting more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it out by the omer, the ones who had collected more had nothing left over, and the ones who had collected less had no shortage. Everyone collected just as much as they could eat. ¹⁹ Moses said to them, "Don't keep any of it until morning." ²⁰ But they didn't listen to Moses. Some kept part of it until morning, but it became infested with worms and stank. Moses got angry with them. ²¹ Every morning they gathered it, as much as each person could eat. But when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

²² On the sixth day the people collected twice as much food as usual, two omers per person. All the chiefs of the community came and told Moses. ²³ He said to them, "This is what the LORD has said, 'Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. But you can set aside and keep all the leftovers until the next morning.'"

²⁴ So they set the leftovers aside until morning, as Moses had commanded. They didn't stink or become infested with worms.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Common English Bible

⁶ What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop. ⁷ Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work.

Milk, Blood and Money

There was a potter who needed a pitcher for the milk she poured over her cereal every morning. So she measured the height of the shelves in her refrigerator and calculated the necessary dimensions for a half-gallon pitcher. She went to her studio, chose the clay she thought best and sat at her wheel. She made a shape pleasing to her eyes--after all it was her pitcher--she put on a handle shaped to her hand and added a pouring lip for that was the purpose of the pitcher. She brushed on her favorite color of glaze, fired it and was delighted with the results--she had created a beautiful pitcher.

She took it home, filled it with milk, put it in the refrigerator and went to bed. The next morning the potter poured a bowl of cereal, opened the refrigerator, and reached for her new pitcher. The pitcher suddenly shouted, "Oh, no you don't! Keep your hands off!"

The potter responded, "I was just going to pour some milk on my cereal."

"No, you're not!" Replied the pitcher. "I worked hard to get this. I started out with no milk at all, but through hard work and careful stewardship, I am now full of milk. No one's going to come along and pour out all that I've wanted so long to achieve! Anyway, I need all this milk; I've got a kid going to dairy school next year."

"Hmmm," pondered the potter. "I don't think you understand the real story here. You see, I created you and I made you for the express purpose of filling you with milk so that I could pour it out each morning on my cereal. You were made to pour not to store!"

"A nice story, but I don't get it," said the pitcher. "But seeing that you are in need, I am a generous pitcher. I will give you two tablespoons of **my milk**. That should wet the cereal nicely. **Everything in Moderation -- that is what I think!**"

The potter looked deeply into the heart of the pitcher, "You're afraid," she said, "If you allow me to pour out the milk you will find yourself empty, that you will then be poor, and that I will throw you out and find another pitcher. You don't realize that if you allow me to empty you, I will have found you to be a **priceless pitcher**. Then I will continue to fill you to the top over and over and over again, and we will become partners in emptying and refilling you. Perhaps, if you are willing to be emptied more completely and more often, I will find many other bowls of cereal who are longing to be drowned in the love of your giving."

"And what if I don't believe you and want to play it safe and just keep the milk I've got?" The pitcher inquired.

"You are free to make that choice," the potter said with a sad voice.

"Then I will make another pitcher who is willing to be my partner. I will have to set you on the back of the refrigerator shelf. You can keep your milk. But after a time, your odor will keep everyone away, and you will have missed the greatest job for which all pitchers are created -- **the joy of being poured out!**"

We are just beginning an informal church season called the Annual Campaign. During this season many Presbyterian churches focus on getting financial commitments from their members for the coming year. Often during this season we are reminded of a part of a verse we read from 2 Corinthians this morning: "God loves a cheerful giver." Unfortunately this phrase is often used sarcastically and sometimes to guilt people in to giving more which does not mean it isn't true. God does love cheerful givers.

Dealing with faith and money issues most of my life I found myself wondering what it meant to be cheerful? The word translated in English as "cheerful" comes from the same Greek root as our word "hilarious". Hilarious means: high spirits that may be carried to the point of boisterous conviviality or merriment. This is not a simple smile on your face as you give – it means getting your whole body into it and shouting a little - the way you get when your favorite sports team wins or makes and great play.

It may be different in Eastern Oklahoma but where I come from boisterous conviviality and merriment are not hallmarks of the Annual Campaign season. In fact the way church members act where I come from might be the exact opposite. This season is marked by differing ways of telling each other that we do not have enough money and it is sure to be worse next year. We tell ourselves our church members don't have enough to increase their giving to the church; we believe the churches are certainly giving all they can give to the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly and to local mission. We tell ourselves we shouldn't ask for more - most churches struggle to keep the budget the same as it was last year.

When we go to balance our budgets as a presbytery and as churches very few of us look to increasing our income instead we ask with a somber look and heavy heart – where can we cut back? During the Annual Campaign season we are no different than the complaining Israelites who were certain there was not enough even in the face of God's promised abundance of manna. **If we want to be cheerful givers we must first be cheerful receivers.**

As we come to the Lord's table today Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:23-24; "I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed to you: on the night on which he was betrayed the Lord Jesus took bread. After giving

thanks he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is for you; do this to remember me.'" Common English Bible

Just like the people of the Exodus - we are God's people, we gather today in God's name. Paul echoes what God promised the Israelites in the wilderness: "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." God has given us everything that we need. This is a fact. God has given every individual and every church represented here everything we need – everything!

Again it may be different in Eastern Oklahoma but my experience tells me we tend not believe God on this issue. We would have trouble containing our joy if we believed God. We would definitely react with boisterous conviviality or merriment. Despite all we have, we spend most of our time worrying about what we don't have now or what we might not have in the future.

As individuals and churches we were created to receive and to give trusting in God's promised abundance – we were made for "the joy of being poured out!" It is safe to say that we are the leaders of the Presbyterian Church in this part of the Body of Christ. In order to be cheerful receivers we have to know what we receive – is it really enough to be excited about? Leaders – do you know what you have received? How much income will your household receive this year? How much will your church receive this year? For those that

know the answer to this question: How much will you give to others from this amount? What percentage is it of the whole? How much will you keep for yourself? If you don't know the answers to these questions about yourself and your church you are not able thank God for the abundance God provides. **Look at what God has given you and your church. Focus on the gift instead of what you believe you don't have. The promise we have from God in Christ is: if you give away what you have more will be given to you – God will take care of you – abundantly.**

How well do we receive? Let's look at a hypothetical situation. Your church has received notification of a five million dollar bequest to be used for the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. The gift is from an anonymous donor so there is no one to ask what the intention of the donor was.

What is your first reaction - after it will never happen to our church? Is this good news for your congregation? Of course it is! What will you do with this gift? I hope you have plans already because you expected it! Do you keep it and live off the interest? Do you give a tenth or a half to those outside your congregation? If you are not giving a portion away – why not? The real joy comes when we keep the money moving. Expect the gift – expect abundance!

Friends we are created to share not to hoard, to pour not to store. Money is like blood – it has to keep moving to fulfill its mission. When it is moving it is

life giving. It moves when we allow ourselves to be generous, when all of our thought is about the well being of the other. It is more than money – we are willing to give all we have including the shirts off our back or our lives for the other person.

Generosity is lived out when we embrace our nature to pour rather than store. It is lived out when we look to money as if it was blood, only good when it is moving and being reused. Money is not only the life's blood of the church but one of the ways Christ is truly alive in the world through us.

Friends we live by example. It doesn't take much to start a movement. It begins with very few people willing to risk not being followed. We, this group gathered here, could be a model for individuals and churches throughout the nation. We could covenant with each other as individuals and churches that we will work towards accepting and acknowledging God's abundance by celebrating what we have and doing our best to give it all away - knowing that we will be filled again. As churches we could report back to each other where we are on the journey. We could celebrate where we are as churches and as a presbytery at each meeting thanking God with boisterous conviviality and merriment. It really doesn't matter how we vote on issues. We do not have to take sides about accepting God's abundance and passing it on to others. Let the Greg know if you are interested in working on this together ...