



## West Point United Methodist Church

AUGUST 2009

“A good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Luke 6:38

This verse from Luke comes at the tail end of Jesus’ powerful preaching we’ve come to know as the Beatitudes. The folks that were there that day had already heard some pretty radical stuff: how God has a special place in His heart for the poor, how God honors those who are marginalized and scorned in God’s name, how those who delay gratification in this world find true riches in the next and God expects us to love everyone, even our enemies. For us reading these words today, the verse noted above seems to be just one more really good sentence in a continuing theme. But the folks hearing Jesus speak these words for the very first time would have made an immediate mental connection to a practice of the day known as “gleaning.” When harvest time came, the wealthy landowners would hire workers to come and help them bring it in. By custom and practice, they would also allow the poor and the widows and orphans to come and “glean” or pick up the grain or produce that the workers spilled, missed or otherwise left behind. This was how the poor were taken care of in biblical times. For the workers, their job was simple: fill their baskets and take them to the wagon or the storage barn and come back out to the field and start the process again until the day was over or the harvest was complete. Since they were paid by the hour, they had little incentive to fill their baskets to the brim. Both in terms of lighter loads and extending the work day, it wasn’t in their best interests to completely fill their baskets. Not so with the gleaners. The gleaners would fill their baskets to the brim and then they would shake them down so that the grain would settle further down — as far down as possible. After that, they would press the grain down even more to take advantage of every available iota of space until the basket was overflowing. To them, it was literally a matter of life or death. A full basket meant that their families would eat one more meal or two and a partially full basket meant that they might not. Pressing down the grain then, might make the difference between surviving the winter or starving. When Jesus spoke these words about a good measure being pressed down, the folks hearing them would have immediately understood the implied questions: “are you living out the biblical commands to love neighbor as self? Are you demonstrating radical hospitality, extravagant generosity, passionate worship, risk taking mission and service to the lost and broken; or are you simply going through the motions when it comes to God and your faith?” They would have understood that Jesus was telling them the way you live out these things are how God is going to judge you — how God will measure you. In my prayer life, I have become convinced that Jesus is speaking to us across the centuries as well; especially those of us in the mainline de

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nominal churches in America today and yes, even to us specifically at West Point UMC. So what is God saying to us in 2009 with these ancient words of Jesus? It seems that God is reminding us of how richly He has blessed us. With the plans for the park, the future new building, the new ministry initiatives with the cluster groups and so on, I know that it seems like our basket is full. You might recall from last month's newsletter, we celebrated the fact that our average attendance was around 86. We noted that when churches our size hit around 80 percent of their capacity, they are perceived as full and tend to plateau and attendance may even drop off a bit because the folks that come there think: “Wow, this is a happy church but there's no room for me.” In our church, that's exactly what's happening right now. So the leadership has tasked the worship committee to design a second worship service. They have done so. **On September 20th, we will begin to have two worship services each Sunday. Our traditional service, which is like the one we enjoy every Sunday now, will start at 8:45 AM that day. Sunday School will be at 9:45 PM and our new contemporary service will start at 11:00 PM.**

The obvious question: “Why?” Why go to all this trouble and change when things are going so well for us? Many of us don't like change and yes, this will be a huge change. **On August 9th we will experiment with our first contemporary service at 10:30 and we will have an all church meeting immediately after the worship service to discuss the changes.** You will hear your pastor say two things at this meeting: one is that a big reason we need to do this is that if we want to have our average attendance get significantly past 86, we have to provide more worship space and the only real way we can do that is a second service. A second service will relieve the parking problems and worship space problems. Secondly, and more importantly you will hear your pastor say that if it was simply about numbers for numbers sake, *we wouldn't do this!* But that brings us back to the words of Jesus from Luke chapter six. I sense that God is telling us to shake the grain of our comfort zone so that it settles; press down the notion that our preferences are somehow more important than God's purpose so that it makes more room. There are lost and hurting people out there and God is asking us to go get them. There are people out there that don't know the truth about God's redeeming love and they are seeking, but they don't know where to look. Some of them might even be pretty sure that they won't find that truth in a church. God wants us to be the exceptional church where they can find that truth. I believe that God is telling us to make room for these people because He is going to send them to us. They might not look quite like us; they might not sound quite like us; and it is quite likely that they won't experience God quite the same way we do. But God loves them and He wants them to know Him better and God is asking us to help make that happen. When it comes time for God to “measure us” here at West Point UMC, do we want to be remembered as Christians who just go through the motions? Or do we want to be remembered as the Christians who saw God's leading our lives as literally a matter of life or death? I know which way I want to go. How about you?

Blessings,

Pastor Jeff