

TITLE: "Amazing Sacrifice"

TEXT: Luke 6:38 (NT p.65)

Jesus says: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

As mentioned, our annual meeting will be held after the service today. To be efficient, I will combine my annual report with the sermon so that those who are not able to stay will be able to hear it and those who ARE able to stay will not have to listen to me twice in one Sunday morning.

Let me begin with a story from the little book *Moments for Pastors* by Robert Strand:

Bob Smith was recovering from a massive heart attack and part of his therapy was exercise. One afternoon while he was out walking, the phone rang at home and his wife Delores answered. The call was from the *Reader's Digest* sweepstakes office in New York. They were calling to inform the Smith family that Robert had just won \$1,500,000 and in a few days the certified check would be arriving. Well, as you can imagine, Delores was absolutely ecstatic. Now all those dreams would come true!

But then she remembered that the doctor had said that if Bob had a shock of any kind he might have another heart attack and die. She simply couldn't decide what to do, so she called their pastor and explained the situation. Pastor Baldwin said he could handle it and would be right over.

Later that afternoon, the three sat in the living room and the pastor said, "Bob, I have a problem and need your advice. ...I have a theoretical situation regarding Christian stewardship. What would a person—take you for instance—do if all of a sudden you found you had won \$1,500,000? What would you do with the money?"

"That's easy," Bob replied, "I'd start by giving \$750,000 to the church."

Whereupon, Pastor Baldwin had a massive heart attack and died right on the spot!

This morning, I find myself in a situation similar to that of Pastor Baldwin. No, no one gave the church \$750,000 ...but Sven and Alice Loman, who were part of our church family before their deaths, DID leave us a bequest of over \$76,000 last year. Can you imagine that? THANK YOU Lord, and thank you Alice and Sven Loman!

Where did that money go? Session decided that \$5,000 of the bequest should be used for the new sound system.

Session decided that another \$5,000 of the bequest would be used for a cross to be displayed somewhere out front. Why? Because last summer we were startled to learn that many people in our community do not know this building is a church. Some people think it's part of the Methodist church next door. Some think it's a municipal building.

Take a look next time you are driving by, especially if there are cars and trucks parked out front in the street. You really cannot see the sign and it really IS hard to tell that this is a church. In the summertime, trees also mask our identity. So, a committee was formed at Session last Tuesday and they will be will eventually bring a recommendation to Session and Session will make a decision about a cross.

The balance of the bequest from the Lomans, about \$66,000, was invested. One third of the interest generated will be reserved for capital projects and two thirds will be used to help balance the annual budget. ...WOW! ENJOY this, folks! A bequest like this only happens once every 202 years and YOU were here when it happened!

We have a WONDERFUL church! If you think it's wonderful, too, start inviting people to come to church with you. I have been inviting LOTS of people to church. No one has been the least bit offended. Some, like the Mary Ann who is doing some painting at our house, tell me they attend elsewhere. That's fine. We had a nice conversation about our churches. Many of those I have invited to church have come. Try it!

People in our Presbytery hear about all our church is doing and they often ask what I am doing to make the Dryden church such an ACTIVE congregation. I always say, "Don't look at me. Come on over on Sunday morning and I'll introduce you to the movers and shakers who get the work of our church done."

The hallway that connects our two buildings is not just being repaired—it looks MUCH better than it did originally!

We have an amazing Youth Group with exceptional leaders and very talented and compassionate teens.

Our choir is terrific. Every week they prepare and present special music for our service led by Scott and accompanied by Shirley.

The Kitchen Cupboard is providing food for Dryden families each month, many of whom are currently unemployed or underemployed. The WEB program is providing nutritious snacks so that forty Dryden elementary school children can learn better because they are not coming to school hungry.

We have a wonderful Praise and Worship team – Scott, Gabe and Michelle.

One of the main reasons our congregation functions so well is our committed staff. Please take every opportunity to thank Al Macomber, Scott Miller, Carol Robinson and Shirley Wright. Many do not realize the time they give and how cheerfully they serve us and the Lord.

We have exceptional Elders who are guiding us through these spiritually and financially turbulent times. We have Deacons who are committed to helping those in our church family.

Many of you come to help clean up the grounds on Blue jean Sundays and Piers makes sure the lawn gets mowed. We have dedicated Sunday school teachers and people who take care of our littlest ones in nursery during services.

We have wonderful women who sign up to do coffees and receptions and make yummy desserts. These wonderful women, along with some men, have planned and presented two Women's Retreats over the past couple years and they are now planning to host a Presbytery meeting on June 14<sup>th</sup>. Please sign up to help!

We have men who, along with some female pie and turkey bakers, prepare the Washington Day Dinner each February. This year it will be held on February 17<sup>th</sup> and will be served buffet-style—something new.

Last year we held our first chicken BBQ over at Clark's. This year we are planning to hold two; one on June 4<sup>th</sup> and the other on October 8<sup>th</sup>. Pitch in to help and have a great time in the process!

We generously support Heifer International, One Great Hour of Sharing, Blanket Sunday, CROP Walk, PW Thank Offering, Undie Sunday, Thanksgiving Baskets, Christmas Joy Offering and the Mitten Tree.

Our church family is LIVING our faith in Jesus Christ, we are passing on our faith to the next generation and we are ministering to the needy here in Dryden and all around the world. What makes all this happen? SACRIFICE. It's you who are sacrificing, your time, your abilities and your financial resources so that the work of the Lord can be done. ...Let me tell you a story about sacrifice (Author unknown):

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, lived a family with eighteen children. Eighteen! In order merely to keep food on the table for this mob, the father who was a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day at his trade and any other paying chore he could find in the neighborhood.

Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of the children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the Academy.

After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a pact. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his earnings, support his brother while he attended the academy. Then, when that brother who won the toss completed his studies in four years, he would support the other brother at the academy, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by laboring in the mines.

They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church. Albrecht Durer won the toss and went off to Nuremberg.

Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works.

When the young artist returned to his village, the Durer family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter, Albrecht rose from his honored position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled Albrecht to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you."

All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No ...no ...no ...no."

Finally, Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved, and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look ... look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bones in every finger have been smashed at least once, and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother ... for me it is too late."

More than 450 years have passed. By now, Albrecht Durer's hundreds of masterful portraits, pen and silver-point sketches, watercolors, charcoals, woodcuts, and copper engravings hang in every great museum in the world, but the odds are great that you, like most people, are familiar with only one of Albrecht Durer's works.

One day, to pay homage to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Durer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands," but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love "The Praying Hands."

Many of you have made sacrifices for the Lord and our church family this year. You have sacrificed your time, your abilities and your money. I thank you and the Lord thanks you.

Because of the Lord, and you, we have a wonderful church family and we worship in a beautiful building.

Because of the Lord, and you, we have made our community a MUCH better place for hundreds and hundreds of people, most of them children and the elderly.

Because of the Lord, and you, people all over the world have been lifted out of despair and now they live with assurance and hope.

...What lies ahead for us as a congregation? The rest of 2011 is going to be a wonderful year, a year full of God's wonders, God's love and God's grace, and I look forward to sharing it with the Lord and with you. ...And the neat thing is: we will continue to enjoy God's wonders, love and grace forever and ever and ever.

Amen.