Brok 14

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1984

"C.P.R. AND T.T.T."

I CORINTHIANS 16:1-2
II CORINTHIANS 8:1-5, 9:6-8

A QUESTION WHICH HAS PUZZLED ME FOR A LONG TIME IS THIS: WHY DO PEOPLE WHO COULD GIVE MORE, NOT GIVE MORE? WHAT HOLDS PEOPLE BACK FROM BEING GENEROUS, GIVING INDIVIDUALS? WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE STINGY, WHILE OTHERS ARE NOT?

AN EXAMPLE: THE OFFERING PLATE IS PASSED DURING A CHURCH SERVICE; YOU REACH FOR YOUR BILLFOLD OR PURSE. IN IT YOU HAVE SEVERAL ONE-DOLLAR BILLS, A FIVE-DOLLAR BILL, A TEN AND A TWENTY. WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO PUT IN THE PLATE THE ONE OR THE FIVE, INSTEAD OF THE TEN OR THE TWENTY?

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: LATER IN THE WORSHIP SERVICE THIS MORNING WHEN THIS SERMON IS FINISHED, PLEDGE CARDS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED AMONG YOU. YOU DECIDE TO PLEDGE A TOTAL OF $600, WHEN YOU COULD'VE JUST AS EASILY PLEDGED $800, OR $1000. WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK?

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT HOW GENEROUS OR HOW STINGY WE ARE HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH HOW MUCH WE HAVE OR HOW MUCH WE SAY WE CAN AFFORD.

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE VERY LITTLE IN TERMS OF WEALTH OR MONEY, WHO ARE VERY GENEROUS AND GIVING, AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE QUITE WEALTHY WHO ARE ALSO GENEROUS AND GIVING. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE A LOT WHO ARE VERY STINGY AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE VERY LITTLE WHO ARE ALSO STINGY.

HOWEVER, I BELIEVE THAT MOST OF US DEEP DOWN WOULD LIKE TO BECOME MORE GENEROUS, GIVING, JOYFUL PEOPLE. THAT'S BECAUSE WE'VE ALL NOTICED THAT SUCH INDIVIDUALS ARE HAPPIER AND ENJOY LIFE MORE. THERE'S A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN BEING GENEROUS WITH THE GIVING OF OUR MONEY TO WORTHWHILE PLACES LIKE THE CHURCH AND WITH THE GIVING OF OUR LOVE. IN OTHER WORDS, WE GIVE LOVE THE WAY WE GIVE MONEY! STINGY PEOPLE ARE STINGY PEOPLE!

I. WHAT IS IT THEN THAT HOLDS US BACK?

1. PERHAPS WE'RE AFRAID TO BE GENEROUS. WE'RE AFRAID THAT WE'LL BECOME TOO OPEN, TOO GENEROUS, TOO GIVING, TOO LOVING. BETTER TO PUT THE DAMPER ON OUR GENEROUS SPIRIT BEFORE IT GETS OUT OF CONTROL. IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL, ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE AND CAUSES WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF US. BUT THAT RARELY, IF EVER HAPPENS.

WE FREQUENTLY SAY THAT IF I ONLY HAD MORE, I WOULD GIVE MORE, BUT THEN STOP. A PREACHER WENT TO SEE A FARMER AND ASKED, "IF YOU HAD

$200, WOULD YOU GIVE $100 TO THE CHURCH?" "I WOULD," THE FARMER ANSWERED.

"IF YOU HAD TWO COWS, WOULD YOU GIVE ONE TO GOD?" "SURE," ANSWERED THE FARMER.

"IF YOU HAD TWO PIGS, WOULD YOU GIVE ONE TO GOD?" ASKED THE PREACHER. AND THE FARMER ANSWERED, "NOW THAT ISN'T FAIR. YOU KNOW I HAVE TWO PIGS."

IT'S VERY DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO BECOME TOO GENEROUS--SO DON'T BE AFRAID OF THAT HAPPENING TO YOU.

2. A SECOND THING THAT HOLDS US BACK FROM BEING TOO GENEROUS, IN ADDITION TO FEAR, IS THAT WE FREQUENTLY CONFUSE BUYING AND GIVING. IF WE GO TO BUY AN AUTOMOBILE, WE WANT THE BEST BARGAIN POSSIBLE--THE MOST CAR FOR THE LEAST MONEY. UNFORTUNATELY, SOME PEOPLE THINK OF GIVING IN THE SAME WAY. THEY ASK THEMSELVES, "HOW CAN WE GET BY WITH GIVING AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE? OR WHAT IS THE LEAST I CAN GIVE AND STILL BE RESPECTABLE?"

BUT THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GIVING AND BUYING. WHEN WE GIVE TO THE CHURCH, WE ARE NOT BUYING A SERVICE OR SOME KIND OF OBJECT. WE'RE NOT BUYING SALVATION. WE'RE NOT BUYING A TICKET TO HEAVEN. TRUE OR PURE GIVING IS TO GIVE AND EXPECT NOTHING IN RETURN. WE GIVE

BECAUSE IT IS THE NATURE OF LOVE TO BE GIVING. TO BE A CHRISTIAN IS TO BE A GIVING PERSON. IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE FIND THE TRUE MEANING OF LIFE, ACCORDING TO JESUS.

II. HOW THEN CAN WE BECOME MORE GENEROUS, GIVING PEOPLE? WHAT ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR OUR GIVING?

THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE JOINED FIRST-PLYMOUTH CHURCH SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE AND HAVE ATTENDED ONE OF THE NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION MEETINGS KNOW THAT I ALWAYS REMIND YOU THAT THE BIBLE GIVES THREE GUIDELINES FOR OUR GIVING OF MONEY TO THE CHURCH. WE ARE TO GIVE CHEERFULLY, PROPORTIONATELY, AND REGULARLY, OR IF YOU PREFER--C.P.R. TO GIVE IN THIS WAY ACTUALLY HELPS US TO BECOME MORE GENEROUS, GIVING, LOVING PEOPLE.

IF YOU CANNOT GIVE CHEERFULLY, YOU ARE NOT GIVING ENOUGH. SOME PEOPLE HAVE SAID, "GIVE UNTIL IT HURTS," BUT THAT'S NOT CORRECT. "GIVE UNTIL IT BEGINS TO FEEL GOOD." REMEMBER C.P.R.

THIS MORNING AS YOU PREPARE TO MAKE OUT YOUR PLEDGE CARD FOR THE SUPPORT OF THIS CHURCH FOR 1985, I WANT TO MENTION THREE ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR GIVING WHICH WILL HELP YOU BECOME EVEN MORE GENEROUS, GIVING AND LOVING PERSONS. I CALL THESE THE THREE "T'S" OF GIVING. THEY ARE ALSO FOUND IN THE BIBLE.

OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH TELLS US THAT WE ARE TO GIVE (1) TRUTHFULLY, (2) THOUGHTFULLY, AND (3) THANKFULLY!

THESE THREE ALL FIT TOGETHER AND IN FACT OVERLAP ONE ANOTHER, BUT FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY, LET'S LOOK AT THEM ONE BY ONE.

1. FIRST WE ARE TO GIVE OR PLEDGE TRUTHFULLY. THIS MEANS SIMPLY BEING HONEST ABOUT OUR GIVING. FREQUENTLY I MEET PEOPLE WHO SAY, "I'M GIVING ALL THAT I CAN AFFORD." BUT THAT'S NOT REALLY THE TRUTH. WHAT THEY MEAN IS, "I'M GIVING ALL THAT I WANT TO GIVE," OR "I'M GIVING WHAT IS LEFT OVER AFTER I'VE TAKEN CARE OF EVERYTHING ELSE I WANT."

WHEN YOU GIVE, DO NOT TRY TO FOOL OTHERS OR YOURSELF. BE TRUTHFUL ABOUT YOUR MOTIVES AND ABOUT THE AMOUNT YOU INTEND TO GIVE. A TRUTHFUL STATEMENT FOR SOME PEOPLE WOULD BE--"I REALLY DON'T THINK GIVING IS VERY IMPORTANT," OR "I THINK THAT A PERSON SHOULD ALWAYS THINK OF HIMSELF OR HERSELF FIRST."

FOR OTHERS, A TRUTHFUL STATEMENT MIGHT BE, "I REALLY DON'T THINK THE CHURCH IS VERY IMPORTANT IN MY LIFE OR IN THE LIFE OF THIS COMMUNITY, THEREFORE, I'M ONLY GOING TO GIVE A SMALL AMOUNT."

GIVING TRUTHFULLY THEN, MEANS TO HONESTLY AND

OPENLY FACE UP TO YOUR OWN MOTIVES FOR GIVING OR FOR NOT GIVING. ONLY THEN CAN ONE BEGIN TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

FURTHERMORE, THE DISHONEST GIVERS ARE ALWAYS THE COMPLAINING GIVERS. THEY ACT AS IF THEIR WHOLE BUDGET IS GOING TO BE WRECKED BECAUSE OF THEIR PLEDGE. THIS KIND OF COMPLAINING IS CALLED "POOR TALK." WE COMPLAIN OF HIGH TAXES, HIGH PRICES, AS IF TO CONVINCE OURSELVES AND OTHER HOW POOR WE ARE. ANOTHER SYMPTOM OF THIS DISEASE IS BEMOANING THE COST OF TRIVIAL ITEMS WHILE CONTINUING TO SPEND ON LARGE LUXURY ITEMS.

FOR MOST OF US, "POOR TALK" IS DISHONEST AND IT KEEPS US FROM BECOMING GENEROUS, OPEN, LOVING, GIVING INDIVIDUALS. IN ADDITION, IF WE ARE DISHONEST AND NOT TRUTHFUL IN OUR GIVING, WE ARE NOT CHEERFUL GIVERS.

2. THE SECOND "T" OF GIVING IS TO GIVE THOUGHTFULLY! THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO PLEDGE. THINK ABOUT HOW GIVING IS TO BE MADE AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR LIFE.

AN EXAMPLE OF NOT GIVING THOUGHTFULLY, AS FAR AS THE CHURCH IS CONCERNED, IS SIMPLY TO PLEDGE WHAT YOU PLEDGED LAST YEAR.

THE STORY IS TOLD OF A FARMER WHOSE PIG KEPT GETTING OUT OF THE PEN INTO THE CORNFIELD. TIME AND TIME AGAIN, THE FARMER EXAMINED THE

PEN, FOUND NO BREAK IN THE FENCE AND YET THE PIG KEPT GETTING OUT. FINALLY, THE FARMER LAY IN WAIT BY THE PEN UNTIL HE SAW THE PIG BURROW DEEP INTO A CORNER AND ESCAPE THROUGH A HOLLOW LOG. HAVING CAPTURED HIM AGAIN, THE FARMER THOUGHT HE WOULD HAVE SOME FUN AT THE EXPENSE OF THE TROUBLESOME PIG. HE EXTENDED THE FENCE BEYOND THE OUTLET OF THE LOG AND WAITED. SURE ENOUGH, THE PIG FOUND HIS WAY INTO THE HOLLOW LOG AND OUT. BUT WHAT NOW? HE LOOKED AROUND INCREDULOUSLY, HURRIED BACK TO REPEAT THE PERFORMANCE, ONCE, TWICE. THE THIRD TIME, HE TOOK ONE DISAPPOINTED LOOK AT THE FENCE AND RAN SQUEALING HIS HEART OUT ROUND AND ROUND THE PEN.

WHEN WE DO THINGS OUT OF HABIT OVER AND OVER AGAIN WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT EVEN THOUGH CONDITIONS HAVE CHANGED, WE CAN BECOME VERY FRUSTRATED LIKE THIS PIG AND THAT CAN HAPPEN EVEN IN OUR GIVING IF WE DO IT WITHOUT ANY THOUGHT.

TO GIVE THOUGHTFULLY MEANS TAKING TIME TO REASSESS WHAT YOU ARE GIVING. IT MEANS TO TAKE GIVING SERIOUSLY AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE.

AN ANALYSIS OF OUR PLEDGE RECORDS SHOWS THAT SEVERAL HUNDRED HOUSEHOLDS HAVE NOT CHANGED THEIR PLEDGE AT ALL DURING THE LAST SIX OR SEVEN YEARS. AND MOST OF THESE ARE FAMILIES

WHO ARE NOT ON FIXED INCOMES. THEIR INCOME HAS GONE UP DRAMATICALLY IN SOME CASES, BUT THE HABIT PATTERN OF THEIR GIVING HAS NOT CHANGED.

A THOUGHTFUL GIVER IS NOT AFRAID TO COMPARE WHAT HE OR SHE IS GIVING WITH WHAT IS SPENT ON OTHER ITEMS IN ONE'S BUDGET.

SOMETIMES IT TAKES A CRISIS TO MAKE US THINK ABOUT OUR GIVING. I'VE TOLD THIS STORY BEFORE, BUT IT BEARS REPEATING.

A MAN WENT HUNTING WITH HIS COMPANIONS. IN THE SEARCH FOR GAME, HE BECAME SEPARATED FROM HIS FRIENDS AND COULD NOT FIND HIS WAY BACK TO CAMP. NIGHT FELL; A SEVERE STORM BEGAN. TO PROTECT HIMSELF, HE CRAWLED INTO A HOLLOW LOG. THE RAIN POURED DOWN ALL NIGHT LONG. IN THE MORNING WHEN THE MAN AWOKE, HE FOUND THAT THE LOG HAD SWOLLEN AND HE WAS HOPELESSLY STUCK INSIDE. HE THOUGHT HE WOULD DIE TRAPPED IN THE LOG. LIKE A DYING MAN, HIS WHOLE LIFE BEGAN TO PASS BEFORE HIS EYES. HE THOUGHT OF HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN. HE THOUGHT OF HIS COLLEAGUES AT WORK. HE THOUGHT OF HIS FRIENDS. HE THOUGHT OF HIS FRIENDS AT THE LOCAL CHURCH. AS HIS THOUGHT LINGERED ON THE CHURCH, HE REMEMBERED THE SIZE OF HIS PLEDGE TO THE CHURCH'S EVERY MEMBER CANVASS AND WHEN HE THOUGHT OF THE SIZE OF HIS PLEDGE, HE FELT SO SMALL THAT HE SLIPPED RIGHT OUT OF THE LOG.

3. THE THIRD "T" OF GIVING IS TO GIVE THANKFULLY! A THANKFUL GIVER IS ONE WHO KNOWS THAT ALL THINGS ULTIMATELY COME FROM GOD. WHEN WE ARE THANKFUL, IT BRINGS OUT THE BEST IN US. A THANKFUL PERSON IS NEVER AN UNHAPPY PERSON. A THANKFUL PERSON NEVER COMPLAINS ABOUT GIVING.

THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE I KNOW ARE THOSE WHO ARE GIVING, GENEROUS, LOVING, THANKFUL PEOPLE--AND THE MORE ONE GIVES, THE MORE THANKFUL ONE BECOMES. AND THE REMARKABLE THING ABOUT BECOMING A GIVING PERSON IS THAT THE MORE WE GIVE, THE MORE WE HAVE TO GIVE. LOVE, SYMPATHY, APPRECIATION, JOY, EVEN THE GIVING OF MONEY--THESE THINGS DO NOT EXHAUST THEMSELVES BY USE. THEY ARE EXPANDED. THEY MULTIPLY.

IN THE ACT OF BEING A THANKFUL GIVER, YOU ARE MADE MORE AWARE OF YOUR CONNECTION WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS AND WITH CREATION ITSELF. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. WE LIVE IN A CREATION OF CONNECTIONS--WHERE EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED AND RELATED TO EVERYTHING ELSE. GIVING IS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THAT FACT. WHAT I DO AFFECTS YOU. WHAT YOU DO AFFECTS ME. WHEN WE ARE THANKFUL, GIVING PEOPLE, WE ALL AFFECT EACH OTHER FOR THE GOOD, AND THE WHOLE WORLD IS MADE BETTER. WHEN WE ARE STINGY PEOPLE, WE DENY OUR CONNECTION WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS AND WE AFFECT THE WHOLE WORLD FOR THE WORSE.

WHEN WE BECOME TRUTHFUL, THOUGHTFUL AND THANKFUL

GIVING PERSONS, OUR WHOLE LIVES CHANGE FOR THE BETTER AND WE HAVE AN EFFECT FOR THE GOOD THAT SPREADS THROUGHOUT THE CREATION. WE ARE NO LONGER AFRAID. WE ARE NO LONGER GREEDY AND JEALOUS AND HOSTILE. A GIVING PERSON IS A FREE PERSON. A PERSON WHO TRIES TO HOLD ONTO EVERYTHING BECOMES A SLAVE TO HIS OR HER POSSESSIONS. GIVING HELPS US TO LEARN TO LET GO.

I BELIEVE THAT ALL OF US WANT TO BECOME MORE GENEROUS, GIVING, LOVING, HAPPY PEOPLE. BEING A TRUTHFUL, THOUGHTFUL AND THANKFUL GIVER, AS WELL AS A CHEERFUL, PROPORTIONATE, REGULAR GIVER CAN HELP US ALONG THE WAY. THIS MORNING, RESOLVE TO BECOME A NEW KIND OF PERSON THROUGH A NEW KIND OF GIVING. AMEN.