

Baron De Rothschild was one of the richest men who ever lived. Legend has it that the Baron once posed before an artist as a beggar. While the artist, Ary Scheffer, was painting him, the financier sat before him in rags-holding a tin cup. A friend of the artist entered, and the baron was so well disguised that he was not recognized. Thinking he was really a beggar, the visitor dropped a coin into the cup.

Ten years later, the man who gave the coin to Rothschild received a letter containing a bank order for 10,000 francs and the following message: "One day you gave a coin to Baron de Rothschild in the studio of Ary Scheffer. He chose to invest it and today he is sending you the capital which you entrusted to him, together with the compounded interest. A good action always brings good fortune. Signed, Baron de Rothschild."

A simple act of kindness was greatly rewarded.

40 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.'
Even a cup of cold water, says the Master, given to one of his little ones will be rewarded.

At the heart of Christian faith is the spirit of Giving. "God so loved the world that He gave . . ."

One day, a student asked anthropologist Margaret Mead for the earliest sign of civilization in a given culture. He expected the answer to be a clay pot or perhaps a fish hook or grinding stone. *Her answer was "a healed femur."* The femur, of course, is a bone in the leg. Mead explained that no healed femurs are found where the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, reigns. **A healed femur shows that someone cared.** Someone had to do that injured person's hunting and gathering until the leg healed. **The evidence of compassion, she says, is the first sign of civilization.**

At the heart of Christian faith is COMPASSION. How will they know we are Christians? BY OUR LOVE. CHRISTIANS DO NOT LIVE BY THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE BUT BY THE LAW OF LOVE. Great Christians have always been great givers.

John Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century, was one of the most powerful preachers in church history. Yet he devoted more time and energy to the poor than to preaching. He established many charities, hospices, and hospitals for those in need.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of a great monastic movement, led many people to Christ. He also established a network of hostels, hospices, and hospitals that survive today.

John Wyclif, who translated the New Testament into English, led a grass-roots movement of lay preachers and relief workers who ministered to the poor.

General William Booth was a Methodist preacher when he started The Salvation Army.

Dwight L. Moody, one of the best known of all the pastors in America established more than 150 street missions, soup kitchens, clinics, schools, and rescue outreaches. **YES, CHRISTIAN FAITH IS ABOUT GIVING!!**

We only have to survey the ministry of Jesus to see that. There was nothing self-serving in anything he ever did. He was truly the Man for others. And he calls us to be men and women for others. **AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR FAITH IS THE "SPIRIT OF GIVING."**

Now our GIVING takes on two forms.

First, we give to help those WHO NEED A "HELPING HAND." We are so privileged -- most of us. We have so much. We sometimes forget how little many other people in this world have.

John Bowes, chairman of the parent company of Wham-O, the maker of Frisbees, once participated in a charity effort. He sent thousands of the plastic flying discs to an orphanage in Angola, Africa. He thought the children there would enjoy playing with them.

Several months later, a representative of Bowes' company visited the orphanage. One of the nuns thanked him for the wonderful "plates" that his company had sent them. She told him the children were eating off the Frisbees, carrying water with them, and even catching fish with them. When the representative explained how the Frisbees were intended to be used, the nun was even more delighted that the children would also be able to enjoy them as toys.

On one level, that story is rather amusing. On another, it is very sad. There are people who would prize even our cast-off items, who would be grateful to eat what we throw away. **A cup of cold water . . .**

It matters to Christians that there are people in need -- not just because we are nice people but because there was a time when we were in need. We are the recipients of grace. God loved us when we were helpless and undeserving. Thus, we look around for others who are helpless and perhaps even undeserving so that we may pass on the love we have received.

Did you know, by the way, that the word "chapel" comes from the Latin word CAPELLA, which means "cloak." According to tradition, the word originated with the story of St. Martin, a Roman soldier who gave his cloak to a beggar dying of cold. St. Martin's cloak became a relic and was kept in a building that soon took on the cloak's name" CAPELLA. In France the word became CHAPELLE, and in England it was CHAPEL. **However you pronounce it, a chapel is a cloak of God for poor beggars such as us.** And because we know ourselves to be beggars where the grace of God is concerned, we do not shun the beggars of this world. **That is the first form of our "giving" to those who are in need.**

The second form of our "giving" is to the "WORK OF GOD."

You may have noticed that the lesson we read at the beginning of this message was not about giving to the poor but giving to those who are engaged in the work of God. Jesus says, *"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. . . And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward."*

The little ones he is referring to are those ordinary people he has sent out to do his work.

Remember, Christ was sending his followers out into a very cruel world. Often they were totally dependent on the kindness of strangers in the lands which they visited. "Remember," Jesus is saying, *"when you receive one of them and help them and give them even a cup of cold water, you are doing it to me."*

As your pastor, I never apologize for asking you to support the work of Christ through the church. It is actually the highest privilege I can give you. After all, you never know what kind of good can come out of even the smallest gift.

I once read about a woman whose church group bought Christmas gifts for a missionary family. After meticulously selecting the presents based on the family's needs, sizes and ages, the group gathered to pack them. That's when another member whisked in and plopped an almost-new man's coat on the table. Her husband didn't like the style. As she turned to go, she suggested that maybe one of the missionaries could use it.

Several people were offended. The coat wouldn't fit anyone in the missionary family. Obviously, the woman hadn't given much thought or time to the project. But the other presents didn't completely fill the barrel they were packing. So someone folded the coat and stuck it in. It made perfect packing material.

After Christmas, a thank-you letter arrived from the missionary family. **They thanked the church for their many gifts and especially for the "miracle" gift.** It seems that, during a storm, a destitute man knocked on their door. He was so ill-dressed for the cold, they invited him to stay until the storm had passed. Even though their visitor would have no gifts in the barrel, they decided to open it. That's when they discovered the coat. It fit the man perfectly.

Do such things really happen in this world? Yes they do - all the time. *You never know when you give that "CUP OF COLD WATER" whether to the needy stranger or to the work of God,*" how that gift may be used. And that brings us to the final thing to be said. **According to our lesson for the day:**

No gift given to the needy or given to the church is ever given in VAIN!!

Jesus said, "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward."

Some people are afraid to give their money, their time, their talent, their life to God because they think they will LOSE WHAT THEY GIVE. Unfortunately, they don't understand GOD'S ECONOMY. **They don't realize that God works just the opposite.**

A small, middle-aged woman was present at a workshop in New York City titled "*Family Folklore: Preserving the Stories of the Past.*" A little nervous, she stood and began to speak. She told how she was born in Estonia and that as a child her parents had given her a doll. Since it had come from France, **she called it Cherie.** *Oh, how she loved Cherie. The doll became her most valuable possession.*

About that time, her cousin, Doris, came to live with her family. Doris was 12 and her father had just died. Doris played with Cherie and also became quite attached to the doll. When the time came for Doris to leave, she held Cherie tightly against her. The girl's mother said, "**Doris has lost her father, and she needs the doll more than you do.**" **"Let Doris have it. God will return it to you."** The woman told how hurt she was and how she wept bitterly. **As time passed and Cherie was not returned, she lost her faith in God.**

The times were terrible. The Nazis came and the woman's family was forced to flee Estonia. She learned that the house of Doris's family had been bombed by the Luftwaffe and they were forced to flee for their lives. Doris and her family saved only their lives and the clothes they were wearing. Eventually, all the woman's relatives left Estonia. Many died in the Holocaust. The survivors began new lives in different lands.

The woman made her way to the United States. And although the years passed, *she never forgot Cherie.* She was surprised one day to learn that her cousin, Doris was still alive and also living in the United States. **They ran into each other once or twice, but neither ever mentioned the doll.**

Then before the woman was to give birth to her first child, Doris came to visit and brought a gift. "It was Cherie." Doris told me that when she ran from the burning house, she put Cherie in her kerchief. She carried Cherie all through the war. If you think I wept before, it was nothing to the tears I wept when I saw Cherie. **And then my faith in God was restored. For what my mother said was true."**

Yes, it was true. But it was true long before the woman's mother said it. It was certainly true when Jesus said, "*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it*" (Matthew 16:25).

You may think that if you give your money to God, you will lose it.

You may think that if you give your time in service to God, the church and others, you will lose it.

You may think that if you give your talents and spiritual gifts to help build up the body of Christ, you will lose them.

You may think that if you give yourself wholly to God, you will lose the only thing you really possess. **Don't believe it! What you give, you will keep, for God will give it back to you.**

That is what Jesus is saying to us about the "CUP OF COLD WATER." **Christian faith is about giving.** Remember, Jesus said, "*And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.*"

GIVING IS ABOUT...Giving to those in need and giving to the work of God. But no gift is ever given in vain. What we give will be returned to us many times over. **YES, you and I both have Christ's word on it!**