

Sermon Title: Giving in a Tight-Fisted World  
Text: Rom 12:1-8; Jeremiah 32  
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Main Point: Give expectantly, with the assurance that God is working to restore you.  
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It was early spring on the mountain. Anne and I were to be married soon and we would live in the house where I had been living and leading a mission program for youth groups to work on the homes of families who lived in poverty. We were getting an early start on our first garden together.

We dug happily that idyllic afternoon, sun dropping low in the sky, the temperature perfect, humidity low, trees just starting to bud, bee hives set on an old wooden wagon, surrounded by century-old buildings. We breathed in the earthy smells of the soil with the satisfaction of a near perfect day.

Just then we learned what my dad meant when he used to say someone “made a bee line” for the house. A bee line is the line that a bee takes when it leaves the hive in the morning for a hard day at work - AND it is the same line that the bee follows to return to the hive in the evening. Our first garden was directly in the bee line and we were working in the garden when the bees began to swarm back to the hive on that path.

Anne felt it first as they began to land on her. They were confused because she was much softer than the hive and they began to sting. We made our own bee line for the safety of the house. That garden was never planted - lying as it was right in the bee line. The problem with the bees was not that they were targeting us. But the location of our garden in their line to the hive made gardening very difficult. We could not overcome the problem of the bees and it took away our desire to even have a garden. Instead of the bounty of tomatoes, peppers, squash and okra that we had anticipated, we settled for canned and frozen vegetables our first summer together.

I think that many of us have been feeling like we have been trying to make our garden in the bee line in this economy. Our efforts to thrive financially may have met with serious resistance. We may have been stung too many times and have retreated to nurse our wounds. We have settled for scaling back on eating out, traveling, buying for ourselves. We have become very careful about everything that we spend. We may even be guarding our nest egg because we cannot be sure of our financial future.

(Recall the story told in Jeremiah 32) The prophet Jeremiah lived in a worse time than this. God called on him to do a lot of crazy things to emphasize that the Israelites had been living unfaithfully. Now he had been jailed by the king for his criticism. Just outside the walls of Jerusalem were the Babylonians who had laid siege to the Holy City. When

the Babylonians were literally scaling the walls of Jerusalem, Jeremiah heard the word of God telling him to purchase the land that his cousin offered to sell him. Do it in front of witnesses and have the purchase recorded. God called Jeremiah to this act of faithfulness to bear witness to God's promise to again restore the chosen people.

When most Israelites in Jerusalem were shaking in their shoes and trying to hide everything of value from the impending plundering, Jeremiah was buying property on which to build houses and vineyards in the future.

I think that there are some lessons that we can learn from this story even today about giving in a tight-fisted economy.

The first lesson is one that I have been talking about for weeks. Jeremiah acted with intentionality. It was not an act of foolishness that he bought that land. It was an intentional response to God's call on his resources. I hope I have already made my point about the importance of intentional giving.

The second lesson is the one I want to focus in on today. It is that we should give expectantly. When Jeremiah bought that land, he completely expected that his fellow Israelites would see his act of faith and believe that God had not abandoned them. God would be true and would restore the people to their land.

In today's tight-fisted economy, we would be foolish to squander our resources. But if we feel that we are being called to help others, and if we feel that our church is offering us a hope and resources for abundance in living, then our giving is not a squandering of our resources. Instead it is expectant giving. It is giving toward goals that we are convinced are worthy of the amount we can afford to give.

I believe, as Jeremiah believed, that God is not going to leave us to suffer alone. There is something about shared vision that builds community. And in community our giving benefits all. Perhaps the greatest gift that God has given us is creating us as communal in nature. It is that very communal nature that Jesus called forth as the way God's kingdom is shaped.

In this last week of our intentional giving emphasis, I call you to lift your eyes and look forward. See beyond this season of tight-fisted economy to a time when our faithfulness with less grows to God's faithfulness with many in our community of faith. Let your estimate of giving reflect your faith in God's restorative work in your life. Amen.