

## 1 Sermon, August 1, 2010

Texts: Galatians 6:7-10, 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, John 4:31-38

Title: "Scriptures to Live By: Sowing and Reaping"

1. You reap what you sow.
2. Sow generously
3. Remember that you benefit from the sowing of others

### 1. You reap what you sow.

Daniel Schorr the veteran television reporter and radio commentator died last Friday at 93.

In the news stories that have come out since, I learned a little bit of history, which illustrates one of the main points of this sermon: you reap what you sow. Or, to put it in modern terms, you harvest what you plant.

Daniel Schorr believed that people deserved to know the truth, at least as much of the truth as could be discovered and told. So he was continually trying to dig. Once, when President Nixon was speaking to the Knights of Columbus, he promised that, despite a recent court ruling, he would try to find government funding for parochial schooling.

Daniel Schorr reported that there really was nothing that Nixon could do without violating the court ruling. Nixon didn't like that. There were other things that Schorr reported in the name of truth-telling that landed him on Nixon's secret enemies list.

That was a clear consequence of Daniel Schorr's desire to tell the truth about government. But there was another unexpected consequence. Being on Nixon's enemies list became like a badge of honor. Daniel Schorr got invited to more parties, and could command a higher fee for lectures he would give.

You harvest what you plant. Even when the harvest is kind of surprising.

The young Madison locksmiths who used the internet to post false complaints about their competitors, and bogus good claims about themselves are now harvesting what they planted. They are receiving the kind of negative publicity they gave to others. They will face fines and probably jail time.

You harvest what you plant. As Galatians 6 says:

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**7**You cannot fool God, so don't make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant. **8**If you follow your selfish desires, you will harvest destruction, but if you follow the Spirit, you will harvest eternal life. **9**Don't get tired of helping others. You will be rewarded when the time is right, if you don't give up. **10**We should help people whenever we can, especially if they are followers of the Lord. (Galatians 6:7-10, CEV)

You harvest what you plant. It's true of good and evil, but it's even a more general principle than that. Isaac Newton, when he stated his laws of physics, stated in his third law:

To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction: or the mutual actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts.

In the greater scheme of life, whenever we act for good, there is some good result, even if we are never aware of it.

Or, as some say: No good deed is ever wasted.

In the same way, every bad deed leaves a person diminished.

I just read about a playground built in Port Washington for children with special needs. It all started as an idea of special education teacher Mardy McGarry's, but it blossomed into a whole community effort.

The cost of materials was \$450,000 and members of the community, service groups, individuals, foundations came up with that in remarkable time. But then McGarry discovered the actual construction would cost an additional \$900,000.

Instead, they decided they needed 500 volunteers to work six 12-hour days to complete the project. The only people paid were three "build captains." Volunteers with "build experience" became coordinators, those who could operate power tools formed a separate group, and so on—down to the "runners." One team served meals donated from local restaurants and churches, and another organized activities for the children of volunteers. Today, Possibility Playground is one of the most popular destinations in Ozaukee County. The finished wonderland, the length of a football field, sits on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. There's a giant rocking pirate ship, a lighthouse, a rock-climbing wall, high and low rings, monkey bars, palm drums, sandboxes, swings, slides, bridges, and ramps, ramps, ramps. All children play shoulder to shoulder.

It's exactly what McGarry envisioned. "People used to ask, 'Why do you want to build a playground just for children with disabilities?'" she says.

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"They didn't get it. It's only when you build a playground for children with disabilities that you build one for all children."

This is what Jesus talked about when he said,

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21, NRSV.

You reap what you sow.

When you care for the "Least of These," you do it to Jesus, too.

#### 2. Remember that you benefit from the sowing of others

But, then, we also reap what others sow.

We are blessed by the longstanding efforts of others. We are able to enjoy blessings we never earned because others did good.

We are able to have faith because others passed along the message. As Jesus said in John 4:

Even now the harvest workers are receiving their reward by gathering a harvest that brings eternal life. Then everyone who planted the seed and everyone who harvests the crop will celebrate together. So the saying proves true, "Some plant the seed, and others harvest the crop." I am sending you to harvest crops in fields where others have done all the hard work  
John 4:36-38 (CEV)

It's not a closed system. Each good deed does some good somewhere, but what is planted may not be harvested by the planter, but by someone else.

#### 3. Sow generously

You harvest what you plant.

So, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians to plant generously.

The church at Corinth was in a position to be generous to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. So Paul wrote asking them for money. He wrote:

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Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.

Paul goes on:

God can bless you with everything you need, and you will always have more than enough to do all kinds of good things for others.

The Scriptures say,

"God freely gives his gifts to the poor,  
and always does right."

God gives seed to farmers and provides everyone with food. He will increase what you have, so that you can give even more to those in need. You will be blessed in every way, and you will be able to keep on being generous. Then many people will thank God when we deliver your gift.

Basically, Paul was telling them, "You harvest what you plant, so why not plant generously?"

You see, as far as I can tell, the Christians in Jerusalem were in trouble. They had lived together, praising God, sharing together and spending their savings — because they expected Jesus to come again. Then, when Jesus didn't come again, they suddenly found themselves with few resources.

I'm sure that some in the Church at Corinth said, "Well, those Christians in Jerusalem should have been wiser. After all, Jesus said to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Why didn't they remember that Jesus said you will know neither the day nor the hour of his return?"

But Paul asked the Christians at Corinth to give, not because the Jerusalem Christians needed the money, but because the Corinthian Christians *needed to give*. The Corinthian Christians needed to plant the seed, trusting that the harvest would be good.

We don't know how the story turned out. We don't know how generously the Corinthian church gave.

We're faced with the same kind of challenge. How generous are we going to be in our lives? What are we going to plant — good or evil? How much good are we going to plant?

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How much are we going to give to the food pantry, knowing that sometimes we're giving to people who make spending choices we wouldn't make? How much are we going to give to flood relief, when some people "should" have gotten better insurance?

All I can say is what the scripture tells me.  
You harvest what you plant. So why not plant generously?

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." Galatians 6:7-10, NRSV.

**1-2**If I wrote any more on this relief offering for the poor Christians, I'd be repeating myself. I know you're on board and ready to go. I've been bragging about you all through Macedonia province, telling them, "Achaia province has been ready to go on this since last year." Your enthusiasm by now has spread to most of them.

**3-5**Now I'm sending the brothers to make sure you're ready, as I said you would be, so my bragging won't turn out to be just so much hot air. If some Macedonians and I happened to drop in on you and found you weren't prepared, we'd all be pretty red-faced—you and us—for acting so sure of ourselves. So to make sure there will be no slipup, I've recruited these brothers as an advance team to get you and your promised offering all ready before I get there. I want you to have all the time you need to make this offering in your own way. I don't want anything forced or hurried at the last minute.

**6-7**Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.

**8-11**God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon.

His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out. This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that

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becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

**12-15** Carrying out this social relief work involves far more than helping meet the bare needs of poor Christians. It also produces abundant and bountiful thanksgivings to God. This relief offering is a prod to live at your very best, showing your gratitude to God by being openly obedient to the plain meaning of the Message of Christ. You show your gratitude through your generous offerings to your needy brothers and sisters, and really toward everyone. Meanwhile, moved by the extravagance of God in your lives, they'll respond by praying for you in passionate intercession for whatever you need. Thank God for this gift, his gift. No language can praise it enough! **2 Corinthians 9:1-15 (The Message)**

**1** I don't need to write you about the money you plan to give for God's people. **2** I know how eager you are to give. And I have proudly told the Lord's followers in Macedonia that you people in Achaia have been ready for a whole year. Now your desire to give has made them want to give. **3** That's why I am sending Titus and the two others to you. I want you to be ready, just as I promised. This will prove that we were not wrong to brag about you.

**4** Some followers from Macedonia may come with me, and I want them to find that you have the money ready. If you don't, I would be embarrassed for trusting you to do this. But you would be embarrassed even more. **5** So I have decided to ask Titus and the others to spend some time with you before I arrive. This way they can arrange to collect the money you have promised. Then you will have the chance to give because you want to, and not because you feel forced to.

**6** Remember this saying,  
"A few seeds make  
a small harvest,  
but a lot of seeds make  
a big harvest."

**7** Each of you must make up your own mind about how much to give. But don't feel sorry that you must give and don't feel that you are forced to give. God loves people who love to give. **8** God can bless you with everything you need, and you will always have more than enough to do all kinds of good things for others. **9** The Scriptures say,

"God freely gives his gifts  
to the poor,  
and always does right."

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**10**God gives seed to farmers and provides everyone with food. He will increase what you have, so that you can give even more to those in need. **11**You will be blessed in every way, and you will be able to keep on being generous. Then many people will thank God when we deliver your gift.

**12**What you are doing is much more than a service that supplies God's people with what they need. It is something that will make many others thank God. **13**The way in which you have proved yourselves by this service will bring honor and praise to God. You believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by sharing generously with God's people and with everyone else. **14**Now they are praying for you and want to see you, because God used you to bless them so very much. **15**Thank God for his gift that is too wonderful for words! **2 Corinthians 9:1-15 (C E V)**

**31**While this was happening, Jesus' disciples were saying to him, "Teacher, please eat something."

**32**But Jesus told them, "I have food that you don't know anything about."

**33**His disciples started asking each other, "Has someone brought him something to eat?"

**34**Jesus said:

My food is to do what God wants! He is the one who sent me, and I must finish the work that he gave me to do. **35**You may say that there are still four months until harvest time. But I tell you to look, and you will see that the fields are ripe and ready to harvest.

**36**Even now the harvest workers are receiving their reward by gathering a harvest that brings eternal life. Then everyone who planted the seed and everyone who harvests the crop will celebrate together. **37**So the saying proves true, "Some plant the seed, and others harvest the crop." **38**I am sending you to harvest crops in fields where others have done all the hard work

**John 4:31-38 (CEV)**