

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our [Lord Jesus Christ!](#)

As I have mentioned before, I was born in [Bemidji](#), and lived there until my dad finished college at about the same time as I finished third grade. He and mom put him through college, while we lived there in a two-room house with an outhouse in the back. As they could afford it, dad added more rooms. He worked as a carpenter for a construction company while he was in college, and my mom worked part-time in a five-and-dime to help make ends meet. We did not have a car or a television set, I remember walking several blocks to the public library with my folks, and walking to First Lutheran [on Sunday mornings](#), sometimes with both mom and dad, but then later as a younger sister and brother were born, sometimes just with dad. We did not have much, and I guess I did not know better as no one complained. Somehow mom and dad managed to put money aside to buy a bicycle for my eighth birthday.

I have many memories of growing up in Bemidji. Included in those memories are watching my dad stuff dollar bill in a Salvation Army Kettle outside the National Tea grocery store or tipping the guy who brought our groceries home from the grocery store, and the newspaper carrier at Christmas time. I thought it was a special treat when I got to put my parents' offering envelope in the plate. Now these things did not strike me as odd, as generous, or as anything other than a way of life. I do not remember asking about them they just seemed to be things you did as a grown-up.

We moved to Austin when dad got a job teaching carpentry in the vocational school down there, and I was starting fourth grade. I started making a little bit of money doing the occasional odd job, now what I earned was mine to do with as I pleased, but mom always asked me, never told me, but asked how much I wanted to put in my offering envelope and she always put a little aside in a savings account my folks started for me at a local savings and loan. As I got older, I was given an allowance. I remember it well, because it was \$2 a week, a princely sum, at least to me. Mom asked me how much I wanted to give in my offering every week, I told her and every week she gave me a buck and a half, and put half a dollar in my offering envelope. Every year I would get a statement from St. Olaf that I had given \$26.

Years later, long after I was married and had a son of my own, I remember my mom telling me how pleased she had been that I gave of my allowance to the church and did things like drop coins in Salvation Army buckets. At the time she told me this, I was glad I had pleased her. But later, as I reflected on it, I was struck by the fact that I guess I had not known any better when I was a kid, watching the example of my parents, I had grown up to be a cheerful, joyful giver.

I grew up watching my parents give to the church, outside the church, and of themselves as well. I watched my parents as they were active in scouting, [teaching Sunday school](#), working on various church projects, active in the Red Cross, and doing other kinds of giving as part of their regular routine. Now some of that time, scouting and teaching Sunday school, was spent with their own kids, and somehow they always found time to watch me play hockey, or my brother play baseball, and

do a bit more besides. I grew up thinking that the giving of one's self is what real charity is all about. I think it was and is a lesson that took root in me.

Strangely enough, I started thinking about all this as I pondered our Gospel for today. Reading about, studying, reflecting about Jesus' parable of the [Pharisee](#) and the tax collector brought these [childhood memories](#) to mind. I went in this direction because I am not comparing myself against others, nor am I comparing my giving, the giving I did as a child and the giving that Cynthia and I do now, against anyone else's giving either. But our giving pales against the values of the Gospel, and the summary of the Law, love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Our giving simply does not hold even a flicker of a flame to what has been given to me, to us, by Jesus. No matter what I have done, what I do, in my life, with my life, I can only cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

I am humbled, cut down to size, but at the same time, sinner though I be, I am exalted from a life in Christ! Despite my sins, I am, as we are, empowered as children [of God](#), because even as we stand in the need of forgiveness, we are forgiven through Christ. Because of that act of giving on his part, we act in faith knowing that giving has everything to do with the heart of a disciple, everything to do with the heart of this disciple. Because the truth of the matter is, we are, called to reflect the [heart of God](#) through gracious giving, through generous giving. Humbly giving without limit from what we have, not from what we do not have. Giving joyously, giving as a way of life, giving with prayer, giving beyond the tithe, I suppose even giving because we do not know any better! Giving as a disciple!

AMEN