

**VI Encuentro de Hermandades
San Salvador, El Salvador and Brattleboro, Vermont
November 10 and 13, 2022
Stewardship and Pledge Sunday
The Rev Dr Scott Couper
“*Caridad Recíproca*”
Christian Scripture: Luke 6:37-42**

Ojala que proclamo lo que tiene que ser proclamado.

May I proclaim that which needs to be proclaimed.

Ojala que ustedes escuchan lo que tienen que escuchar.

My you hear what needs to be heard.

Todo atraves del espíritu santo que nos guía.

All though the Holy Spirit who guides us.

SKIT WITH JENIFER AMBLER

Friends, allow me to first make a confession. I do not yet practice what I preach. So, this message is for me as much as it is for you. This message is aspirational for me, rather than descriptive. I am not yet where I want to be. I pray my time in El Salvador las t week moved me closer to living-out that which I proclaim this morning.

Our scripture reading this morning might seem to be a random collection of Jesus' sayings. Some biblical commentators suggest that these lessons of Jesus follow one other without rationale, like those in the extracanonical gnostic gospel according to Thomas. Yet if one reads closely, there is a common denominator to

all these sayings. All these verses point to 'the mutuality of life'. Each saying, though they all deal with very different subjects, communicates interdependence. They all proclaim 'how you are, ultimately determines how I am', and vice versa. 'Your destruction is interwoven with mine.' 'My blessing becomes your blessing.' Verse 37 states if you forgive, you will be forgiven. If you judge, you will be judged. Verse 39 rightly concludes that two blind men will lead one another to a pit. Verse 40 notes that good teachers produce good students. Verses 41 and 42 simply reveal that we all err. All these verses share the theme of 'mutuality'.

This morning I would like us to focus on verse 38 that perhaps most perfectly communicates the common denominator of mutuality: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." This verse advises us to give *generously*. Don't just give a lot, pack it down! Not just that. Shake it! Make sure all settles! Then, put more in! Then, pack that down! When it is full, keep pouring, until it overflows. When it overflows, it will spill into you lap. This beautiful scripture states that we benefit when we give. And conversely, we are diminished when we hold back our generosity. The mutuality advocated herein proclaims that the giver benefits as much as the receiver.

[I had a friend and mentor. He was a Blues musician. Man, he could play! Behind his back, with his teeth. He would play with a coffee mug going-up and down the strings. He could play forward and backward, like Jimmy Hendricks. He would send chills up and down your spine. The guitar was living extension of his fingers and his soul.

Before flying-off to serve my church in Africa some twenty-five years ago, some friends and neighbors threw me a farewell party. At the party, my friend sat me down and instructed me to close my eyes and hold-out my hands. And he laid a precious guitar in my hands. Now, you need to understand, I am a musical ignoramus. I can't read a note. I can't play a chord. I have no idea what a sharp and a flat are. I cannot use a guitar. I opened my eyes and tears ran down his face. I asked him, "What are you doing? Why are you crying?" He responded, "I learned a long time ago, if you wish to show someone how much you love them, give them what hurts the most to give". It 'hurt' my friend to give me that beautiful electric guitar. It 'hurt' because it was a valuable guitar. Yet, it 'hurt' more because I could not appreciate the guitar as much as he could. I did not 'deserve' it, as I could not play it.]¹

¹ I preached this section only in El Salvador. I did not preach this section at Centre Congregational Church, UCC.

Friends, in the spirit of engendering a decolonized mission partnership, I have two suggestions for our sister parish in El Salvador (*Cristo Redentor*) related to 'giving' recommended by verse 38. During my short time in El Salvador, I absorbed some of their spiritual heritage. It is a heritage from which our church in the Vermont desperately needs to learn. It will cost our sister church time and money to share it with us. These are two things I know are precious to them in El Salvador. Yet, Jesus counsels us all to give, and it will be given to us all.

First. The United States just held its elections this week (November 8). American society is increasingly armed and violent. We are a society that is increasingly polarized. We see deepening divides that argue in favor of obscene capitalism and socialism. We have an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor. This context sounds familiar to our El Salvadoran brothers and sisters. It should, El Salvador suffered a terrible civil war for twelve years (1979-1992) killing more than 75,000 people.² Our brothers and sisters in El Salvador can share their spiritual heritage with us and warn us of that which is to come if we do not reform ourselves and thus stop the march toward civil strife that seems all but inevitable. If our sister church shares its spiritual history with our church, then perhaps we will wake-up and stop pretending that we as people of faith can sit on the fence

² "Salvadoran Civil War", *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvadoran_Civil_War, accessed November 16, 2022.

and deny that the gospel is political at its very core! Romero taught us that the poor and marginalized cannot be silenced.

Second. The spiritual heritage of our sister church is intimately related to the natural environment and to indigenous spirituality. So many Christians in the United States are climate change denialists and they divorce their faith from its call to be good stewards of the planet. We desperately need our sister church help to draw from the spiritual well that sources their stated unequivocal commitment to the environment and thus to the preservation of God's Creation.

I pray that our sister church in El Salvador will share with us their spiritual resources. I am well aware it will 'hurt' them to give to us. Yet, "if [they] give in good measure, the same measure and more will be returned to [them]." This is not about prosperity gospel. It is about reciprocal beneficence or in Spanish, *'caridad recíproca'*.

Friends, as we share at the table this morning, remember the one who most perfectly taught us that if you wish to show your love for someone, then give what hurts the most to give. The perfect example is Jesus. He gave his very life so as to save ours. Is that not the ultimate in *'caridad recíproca'*? That he and we may share eternal life together. That's mutuality!

This was the world of God and it was preached to the people of God and the people of God responded, "Amen".