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### God Started It: Giving

Is there anyone who might doubt that giving\_ free, generous, giving for its own sake, is at the heart of existence. The biblical message concurs that life is not the result of impersonal accident but the purposeful will of a Sovereign Creator. Who among us did anything to get here? What did you do to get here? You did nothing, right? None of us did anything. At some point along the way of our lives we became self-conscious, aware that we are alive, that the earth is our home, its air ours for the breathing, its beauty ours for the viewing, its wonders ours for the beholding, its joys ours for the embracing. Our faith is that it is not just ours by good fortune but is a gift to us from a loving hand. Giving is the first recorded moral event in the Bible.

*\_then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil...*

*Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner. So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and bird of the air and brought them to the man... but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and the man slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up the place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:7-9; 18-22)*

It is all a gift, the earth for humankind, men and women for each other. When it comes to relationships, giving was the first delight of God. God started it.

Because this is Stewardship Sunday at First Church it is right to emphasize the command of God to the man that he was to till the garden he had been given and keep it. That is what being a steward means, taking care of what one has and using it well. We know that with privileges comes responsibility. We might learn this early as children. A child can not let his or her bicycle out in the rain until it rusts and corrodes and then expect the parents to provide a new one. If we neglect or abuse the gift of this earth and all its life, or our bodies or our souls, until each falls into ruin, we might not wisely anticipate God furnishing us with new ones. The Christian good news is that by the gracious forbearance of God we are granted divine help to restore and renew the ones we have been given but we best not wait too long. There may well be a tipping point to each which once reached may find us looking at damage in some ways beyond repair. Let us not play games with the responsibilities we have been given. God will not allow God's

self to be mocked or fooled. God knows what we do and why we do it. It might be best not to try God's patience too long. The greater the need becomes for repair to our souls or to our bodies or to our relationships or to the earth itself the longer the fixing may take, and so the suffering to be endured in the meantime. The stakes of stewardship are high.

The wonderful thing is that opportunities come with privileges too. We can join God in the divine delight. We can use well what we have and share it with others. We can know the joy of giving. There is a justice built into the fabric of the universe which will eventually always have its way. And so Jesus says,

*Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Luke 6:37,38)*

We might be reminded here of the episode in the Upper Room. When finished washing the disciple's feet Jesus said to them, I have done this as an example for you. Yes, indeed, an example, of servant ministry in this case, but has not God given us examples of different things, is that not God's best and foremost means of teaching, another great gift to us, teaching by example? What is all around us is the evidence of generosity, life itself the great object lesson. We have this opportunity to take part in the creation of good things by using our time and abilities and money in every life creating way, only because God first gave it all to us. At First Church we have adopted as a goal of financial stewardship for each family what has been called the modern tithe. It is five percent of our incomes for the mission and ministry of the church of the Living Christ, and five percent for other Christ-like causes for the full ten per cent biblical tithe.

The joy of giving first began with God. When we give we follow the divine example. God started it. Surely it must please God to be generous to us because God always is. It is also pleasing to us to be generous because we carry within us the divine image. Every opportunity to experience the good things of life is because God gave them to us. Every one.