Many of you know our live-in goddaughters **Rachel and Rebecca**. They’re more live-out goddaughters these days since we got them through high school and on to University. Rebecca continues to do well at Seattle University and Rachel has been working full time taking a break to figure out her educational path.

I love these girls for a lot of reasons but one is that, in a very good way, they challenge me. Not having grown up in our home their innate code of living is, in some important ways, different from ours. And often their outlook challenges me to be different, to be better than I am.

For instance: **I am a card-carrying member of the TV generation.** Every day of my growing up ended with dinner then dishes then the local news followed by the world TV news then something interim for the 7pm hour followed by some sitcom or series at 8pm and another at 9pm and then bed. Saturday mornings were cartoon non-stop from 7am to eleven at least. And after school meant doing homework to Gilligan’s island, Get smart, Batman, McCales Navy, and the Dick Van Dyke Show. Sunday nights meant Wild Kingdom followed by the Wonderful World of Disney- at least in my younger years. I knew the **TV guide** backwards and forwards and could tell you what day it was based on what was on TV and even the time of day based on what was on. This was my childhood.

Though we don’t have broadcast TV or cable we still stream shows and play DVDs and due to my history my brain is trained to relax when the TV comes on and I enjoy it. [recent example]

But while the girls are tech-savvy and smartphoned up they do not like watching TV, not broadcast, not Netflix, not blu ray- nothing. For them, sitting in front of a screen watching a show or movie is not an adequate way to live life. They learned from their early years that engaging themselves in **activity** was better than **inactivity** before the glowing tube. They prefer to be participants over spectators.

They’d rather be socializing with friends than gazing into the flatscreen. They’d rather be making music or attending a live concert than binge-watching Criminal Minds or Longmire or Love it Or List It. I am challenged by this. I ADMIRE THIS IN THEM. I am inspired by their desire to be engaged and living life rather than being satisfied to just watch imaginary stories about it.

The fact of the matter is that *the girls will get more out of DOING something than I will ever get out of watching someone else – some imaginary person- doing something*. The girls inspire me to lean in toward the idea that participants get more out of any event than spectators.

Again: **participants** [those actively engaged, giving time, energy, effort, basically those giving themselves away ] **get more out of any event than those contented to sit and watch.**

When we were cruising up to Alaska this last August. They had a game for married couples: they got newlyweds and the folks married the longest and then they wanted a middle couple to be in the game. All of my natural [introverted] instincts told me it was risk-free and reasonably fun to be a spectator. But Rebekah and I decided we should try to be that middle couple. They gave all of us who were interested a test and we had to look pretty stupid in the process and while they didn’t pick us for the show we did get the 2nd highest applause. And even though we didn’t get ON the show our experience was WAY better because we participated. We joined in. We made the story bigger and better. **Instead of sitting safely in the seats we stood up and volunteered to Give More- that is to give more of ourselves away.**

**Scripture portrays our following of Jesus as active and vigorous.** Jesus brother James tells us we are supposed to be “doers” of the Word not just couch-potato spectators. We’re supposed to be picking up crosses and following. Jesus call is always active: **Follow** me. You, follow me.

If we’re not following, we’re “going.” “**Go** show yourself to the priest,” **Go** sell everything you have and give to the poor,” “**Go** two miles instead of one.” “**Go** report to John what you see.” “Pick up your bed and **Go** home.” **Matt. 10:8** As you **go**… “Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons. “You give them something to eat!” It’s about active participation in the Life of the Gospel.

**Abundant life comes from actively following Jesus.** He says in John 10: I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly. His intent for us is copious, profuse, rich, ample life which only comes from ***going, following, doing.***

Abundant life- it appears- comes from giving up the spectator’s seat and participating: **giving more of yourself away.**

Matt. 10:8 says: Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons. and then it says:….“ **Freely** you received, **freely** give. Last week I mentioned Paul quoting Jesus in Acts 20: *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* To give is to participate. To receive is to spectate. And [2Cor 9:7] God loves the cheerful giver. The giver- active participant- is more blessed [happy/glad]. Throughout scripture this message echoes loud and clear: **“The more you give the more you get.**” That is: *The more you give yourself away, the more blessed you will be with abundant life? LIFE IS IN THE LIVING or better: THE GIVING.*

In Luke 6 Jesus is talking about how we treat people. He says: Don’t judge, don’t condemn, and forgive- and then he says: **Luke 6:38** “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pourinto your lap agood measure — pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

You could probably interpret this to be talking about money or stuff. *But the immediate context is about giving more of ourselves to others*: not judging/condemning but forgiving. And again, as we give ourselves away life is more blessed. And, in fact, the blessing we receive is directly tied to how much of ourselves we give away.

Give more of yourself away and “you’ll receive more blessing.” **Give less of yourself- hide it, hole it up somewhere and you will receive less blessing.**

**Matt. 25:14**   “For *it is* just like a man *about* to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. **15** “To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. **16** “Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. **17** “In the same manner the one who *had received* the two *talents* gained two more. **18** “But he who received the one *talent* went away, and dug *a hole* in the ground and hid his master’s money.

**You know how the story goes:**  The Master comes back to settle accounts. The fellows with the 5 and the 2 talents double what they invested and they are **rewarded with greater work to do and their Master’s JOY .** As to the servant who buried what he had and refused to put it to work in the world the Master calls him **worthless and has him thrown out.**

Those who invested all that the Master gave them, *who participated,* were rewarded with *abundance,* [“to him who has will more be given”] *and a more important work to do and the Joy of their Master.* The spectator who held back all he was given **got nothing** and, in fact, in the story **even what he’d had- what he tried to hold on to- was taken away.** As Jesus says in another place in Matthew [16:25] If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

In your life and faith the Holy Spirit is always calling you to be a participant rather than a spectator because the fact is: **you will only get out what you put in.** Participants get more out of any event than Spectators. *My dear little hobbits, adventures are not “dirty nasty things that make you late for supper.”* Life’s adventures [delightful or troubling] are opportunities for you to choose to give more of yourself away to God and the world, your community, your church, your family and friends.

The next installment of the **Star Wars movie francise** is coming out and those of us of a certain age are all pretty excited about it. The characters are dear to us. *Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan, Princess Leia and Han Solo are part of our modern mythology. “Phrases like: “I’ve got a bad feeling about this” or “I love you.” “I know.” “I find your lack of faith disturbing,” are part of our common lexicon.*

But there wouldn’t be any more movies let alone any defeat of the evil Empire if **Luke** had just kept a nice safe seat in the spectator section and cleaned up the droids and had their memories erased like his uncle wanted- which would have saved him a lot of trouble and pain and loss. Even when he meets **Obi-wan-Kenobi** and hears about Jedi knights and the Force, the temptation is strong to just be a spectator.

**But instead he gives himself away to save that Galaxy far, far away.** And he inspires others to do the same.

**Han Solo** [Harrison Ford] could have taken his reward and made tracks like any good smuggler but *he comes back to give more of himself away*. They both gave themselves to their callings and amazing vistas opened up for them *as well as great temptations and great dangers and marvelous victories.* But their investment paid off in abundant Life.

The Pevensie Children on finding a snowy forest at the back of the old wardrobe could have just sat at the edge and enjoyed it: kept to themselves, made a snowman, played it safe. **But that would have been like burying your talent.** Had they not stepped out of the coats and given themselves to the abundant adventures in Narnia it would have left that world in a state of *“always winter but never Christmas.”* Edmund would never have been tempted or captured or redeemed by Aslan’s willing sacrifice that destroys the white witch and brings abundant life back to Narnia.

**After seeing flights of angels singing in the night sky** the safe and sensible thing to do would be to sit back down ‘round the fire. Instead, the shepherds continue to “fear not” and take the risk of participating in this thing that’s happening around them. They leave the sheep and rush to see the baby in Bethlehem. **20** The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen… They gave more of themselves and were blessed with abundance.

**The stars told some eastern astrologers that Israel’s special King was to be born.** The safe thing to do is to write it down and continue watching the stars for more bulletins about the ongoing situation and wait for news to make it back in the traditional way across hundreds of miles. **No, they refuse to be spectators. They give more.** *They step out to participate in the thing that’s happening around them*, though it means investing money and time and months of travel on bad-tempered camels or uncomfortable donkey backs- let alone taking meetings with cagey old Herod. But their investment of self had a solid return: **Matt 2:10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. **11** After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Luke tells us Mary treasures all the amazing things she hears about her child. And the reason “these things” are to be treasured, the reason they have such powerful meaning is **because she gave herself away** when she said: **Luke 1:38** “I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary; “may it happen to me as you have said.” Mary will not be a spectator but the fullest participant in the thing God is doing.

**In life and in faith you will get out what you put in.**

You will receive dependent on what you give.

What you get out of your marriage will be dependent on what you invest in it.

What you get out of your job will be dependent on how much of yourself you invest in it.

Your family relations and your friendships are all affected by how much of yourself you give away. *You will get out of your life with Christ what you put into your life with Christ.*

What you get out of your fellowship at First Baptist church will depend greatly on what YOU put into it. Simiarly, what you get out of this Christmas season is dependent on what you put into it. The choice is yours: Participator or spectator? Abundant life or flat, safe, tasteless, adventure-free life?

**In the context of Advent Conspiracy “Give More” is about not giving stuff and instead thinking up ways of giving yourself relationally.** Giving more than things by giving yourself to those you love. Doing things with people. Being with people. **Talking laughing, eating, playing in fellowship with people**.

This is what the call to “Give More” means.

People say: “You can’t take it with you.” And that’s true about stuff. **But relationships are eternal because we are eternal.** Because eternity is in our hearts, your relationships will pass with you through death to renewal and restoration in eternal life. Giving more of yourself to others means an abundance to be taken with you- treasures stored in heaven that moth or rust can’t touch. Stuff is quickly forgotten. But your time, your creativity, your words, your touch, your laughter, your thoughts **Those really are eternal.**

After a bunch of years Carl Hansen stepped down from being Co-Chair of COAST. That left deForest Walker carrying all of it. deForest and Carl were typically both at the shelter for at least 2 hours every day during the season. With Carl gone I felt like I should provide some backup for deForest. So since it opened on Nov 1 I’ve been dropping by the shelter most days of the week for the first 60-90 minutes. Is it disruptive to normal life? Yep. Is it tiring? Yep. Is it a little tense or scary even, some times? Yep. But this choice to invest the talent I’ve been given, to “give more,” has unquestionably brought abundance and blessing to my life in the form of knowing better and thus caring more for these beloved widows and orphans. Choosing to be an active participant rather than a spectator, choosing relationship instead of distance, investing myself instead of burying myself on the couch at home has brought me greater work to do and the Joy of my Master.

Of course the biggest scriptural example of this Giving away of self comes from God who loves the world so much He seeks to save it by **coming to us himself**, on our own level. And so Jesus, our Emmanuel comes to us **talking, laughing, eating and playing in fellowship with us**; and ultimately dying just like all of us will die.

Jesus is the template for “Give More” because he gives himself to us. **Phil. 2:5**    Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **6**    Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8**    And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

God’s response to our “human problem was to give himself.” God’s means of revealing the depth of His love and the lengths to which He can be trusted, God’s means to change your life and the world was to give himself. Not things. Not stuff. Himself in time and presence. And **the return for that participation**, that giving of himself, was the **salvation of the world**: all things redeemed and the promise of a world put to rights via resurrection, renewal and restoration-

**And** **his Agent of Restoration**, Emmanuel, who came to serve and to give himself, **expects his followers to follow his lead.** You want to be great in God’s Kingdom then serve. You want to be first then give yourself away in service- just the way I came to serve by giving myself away. (Mk 10:43-45)

**There is an important sense in which Jesus is “enfleshed” in us.** So as his people we are called to practice what Jesus did and give more by giving ourselves. Those who celebrate Christ should imitate Christ and Give more

So my encouragement to you is-in the weeks to come- try to be a full participant in your life, in your faith, **in your Christmas.** Take the risk, look silly, accept the adventure. Say the things that are hard to say. Share the things that are hard to share. Find ways give more of yourself away.

You will get out what you put in. And what you put in will come back to you exponentially … a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by YOUR standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”