

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
 5 March, 2023

Give and Take
for Covenant Renewal Sunday

Did you see the story of Juliette Lamour, who just won Ontario's second-largest lottery jackpot in history? — \$48 million Canadian dollars!

It was the first time she'd played. She had called her grandfather, she says, to tell him she was on her way to bring him some ice cream. "And he said to me, 'You just turned 18. Go buy a lotto ticket; test your luck.'"

"I got to the corner store and ... I had to call my dad." Now she's laughing. "I said, 'Dad, Grandpa wants me to buy a ticket. How do I do it?' He's like, 'O, just go inside and get a QuickPick.'"

Obviously, Juliette got much more than any of them was bargaining on.

When asked what she plans to do with her wealth, she says, "We're going to ... figure out how best to support initiatives that benefit the community. [But for now,] I'm still a university student, so I'm planning on finishing my biology report."

This winning windfall has in no way changed her career plan to become a doctor. "Money doesn't define you," the wise 18-year-old says. "It's the work you do [— what you give —] that will define you."

There's a lovely twist to this story: This isn't the first time Juliette's been featured in the Sault Ste. Marie newspaper. In 2010, when she was five years old, Haiti was ravaged by an earthquake. She was at a hockey game with her family — it's Canada; of course they were at a hockey game! — and the Canadian Red

Cross had set up a table to mobilize aid. Juliette Lamour insisted on emptying her entire piggy bank for Haiti — all \$61.38.¹

*

Obviously, it's great to receive, like getting presents or winning \$48 million, but it's also great to give. And giving from a sense of gratitude, of thankfulness, is the very best giving of all. It has the power to change our lives.

Give and take.

*

Just east of the Farallon Islands outside San Francisco's Golden Gate, a fisherman spotted a humpback whale in distress. She was, in fact, entangled in a terrible web of crab traps and had hundreds of yards of line wrapped around her tail, her torso, and her mouth. When the rescue team arrived, they determined that the only hope for saving her was to get into the water with her — a wildly dangerous proposition. One slap of her tail could kill.

Undaunted, they dove in and worked for hours with curved knives. Eventually, she was freed. The rescuers were bobbing on the surface, prepared to watch her swim away, when she did something very unexpected. She swam in circles — what felt to them like joyous circles. And then, astonishingly, she came back to each of them, one at a time, and nudged them gently. It was, they said, beautiful. The guy who cut the rope out of her mouth says her eye followed him the entire time, and he will never be the same. They all agree that none of them will ever be the same.

Give and take.

Because at Arlington Street we follow science, I'm always curious about how our spiritual principles line up with research. Here you go:

In their book *The Paradox of Generosity*, sociologists Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson lay out an inarguable connection between generosity and happiness. Over a five-year period, they surveyed 2,000 individuals in 40 families from across the country representing different race, class, and ethnic backgrounds, asking them about their spending habits and lifestyles. Three of their findings were:

* First, that those who report volunteering for 5.8 hours a month identify as “very happy;”

¹ Please see [cbsnews.com/news/18-year-old-wins-48-million-lottery-her-first-time-playing-ontario-canada-juliette-lamour/](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/18-year-old-wins-48-million-lottery-her-first-time-playing-ontario-canada-juliette-lamour/) and [goodnewsnetwork.org/5-year-old-who-emptied-piggybank-for-earthquake-relief-now-wins-48mil-lottery-jackpot-at-18/](https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/5-year-old-who-emptied-piggybank-for-earthquake-relief-now-wins-48mil-lottery-jackpot-at-18/)

* Second, “being generous — everything from giving someone directions to helping a friend move ... — activates the part of the brain that makes [us] feel pleasure.”² Those who are emotionally generous in their relationships — who are loving and emotionally available — are in better health than those who are not.³

* Third, those who donate more than ten percent of their income report the lowest depression rates.

Smith and Davidson’s research concluded that generosity is essential to happiness.

Give and take.

A couple of weekends ago, I was driving out on the Cape and turned into a shortcut when, unbidden, I felt two strong emotions at once: a ping of fear and then, immediately, a sort of warm wash over my heart — something like love, something like relief. I realized I was on part of the route I had driven during the COVID shutdown, delivering food to particularly vulnerable neighbors: fear, love, relief.

When the pandemic hit, our friend Trudy Vermehren had just supplied her restaurant, The Fox & Crow, to reopen for the spring. She realized the fresh food wasn’t going to last until ... well, remember when we were told it would all be over by May 4th, 2020? Trudy partnered with a benefactor named Bruce Bierhans, and Common Table was born. Trudy and our friend Kristen Shantz were in the kitchen five mornings a week, preparing the food. A fleet of drivers picked it up and spread out across the outer Cape, bringing meals to isolated elders, people with disabilities, and young families.

Some of the recipients donated money to help float the project — they weren’t necessarily in financial straits. One of them was Danny, who lives alone, disabled from a fall at work. He was grateful for the beautiful food we dropped off, giving him a break from his own cooking, but he was at least as glad to stand in the doorway, talking with us through the glass door we hoped would keep him from getting COVID, discussing everything from how his lilies would need to be thinned soon to how his wife had died of lung cancer — how he hadn’t been able to get her to give up cigarettes and how he missed her.

² Professor Patrick Stokes, Associate Professor of Philosophy, “The power of generosity: why giving is good for you” Please see this.deakin.edu.au/self-improvement/the-power-of-generosity-why-giving-is-good-for-you

³ 48% vs. 31%

The sum of my feelings of fear and love and relief was gratitude at the deepest experience of generosity — not Trudy and Bruce’s generosity, not our generosity in delivering food, but the shared generosity of everyone opening their hearts and letting each other in during a very scary time.

None of us volunteering with Common Table could have anticipated what an effect it would have on all of us who were supporting Trudy’s vision. I know our pod — Rev. Beth, Kem, and I — felt so much gratitude that we could do something.

And this is important: Our part was a little something, not a big something. You’ve heard me say that every gift matters — everything we give to Arlington Street matters — but I’m not only talking about what it enables us to do here, both for ourselves and for others, in our good name. I’m talking about it mattering to our wellbeing, at a soul-deep level.

I’m sure you’ve experienced this — I hope you’ve experienced this: the surprise and delight that you’re actually getting something precious from giving; a sense of worth, of belonging, and peace.

Give and take.

*

One of life’s great mysteries is why people who have the least tend to give the most. Los Angeles, one of the wealthiest cities in the nation, is the least philanthropic. Minneapolis — largely middle class — gives the most. I remember a story Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg told about a friend’s grandfather, who emigrated from Eastern Europe at the turn of the last century. He had made the journey with a beloved childhood friend. They were headed off to different parts of the United States; at Ellis Island, they were forced to part. I think about this moment, and it moves me so deeply: two young men, bravely saying goodbye to the last of everything familiar.

They were starting out with so little, but they wanted to give each other a gift. Solemnly, they removed their brand new nametags, with their new American names written on them, and exchanged them.

I will never forget you, they said. In this way — by exchanging our names — we will share our futures. I promise I will bless your name with my new life.

*

Sharon Salzberg writes, “... Whenever the Buddha was teaching lay people, he would always begin with a teaching on generosity because it can bring so much

joy and self-respect.”⁴ In fact, “the Buddha [taught] that no true spiritual life is possible without [a] generous heart. Generosity ... is the primary quality of an awakened mind.”⁵

*

As I began reflecting on this year’s Covenant Renewal Sunday — about the power of generosity as a spiritual practice, about give and take — I kept hearing stories. There was the \$48 million jackpot and then came these, my favorites. Think “give and take.”

“[Riding] to work today, I watched a teenage boy help an elderly woman with a cane onto the ... bus. He was so careful with her, assisting her every step of the way. The woman had the biggest smile on her face. They both sat directly across from me, and just as I was about to compliment her [on such] a wonderful grandson, the boy looked at her and said, ‘My name is Chris. What’s your name, ma’am?’”

“On my way home from work today, I stopped on the side of the road to help an elderly man who was struggling to change a flat tire. Even though I hadn’t seen him in nearly 30 years, it only took me a few seconds to recognize him. He [was] the firefighter who pulled my whole family out of our burning four-story apartment unit when I was a kid.

“We chatted about it for awhile, and then, as soon as I had the spare tire secured on his car, we looked at each other, shook hands for a prolonged moment and said [at the same time,] ‘Thank you.’”

And finally, this:

“Tonight, at the local convenience store where I work, an elderly man with a guide dog came in, went to the aisle with the greetings cards, picked up a card, held it up really close to his face, and struggled to read it. Just as I was about to walk over to help him, a big truck driver asked him if he needed assistance reading, and then proceeded to read him almost every single greeting card out loud until the man smiled and said, ‘That’s perfect! My wife will love that one!’” The truck driver beamed.

*

⁴ Please see onbeing.org/blog/the-real-power-of-generosity/?

⁵ Sharon Salzberg, *A Heart as Wide as the World*, pp. 185-186

Beloved spiritual companions, today, as we renew our great covenant of love and service and make financial gifts to support Arlington Street and our work in the world, let's embrace give and take.

Generosity is essential to happiness.
Giving from a sense of gratitude has the power to change our lives.

The guy who cut the rope out of the whale's mouth
will never be the same.

The teenage boy and the elderly woman,
the firefighter with a flat tire and the man whose life he saved,
the truck driver reading greeting cards:
Generosity is the primary quality of an awakened mind.

I promise, said the childhood friends as they exchanged nametags,
I will bless your name with my new life.