

St. John 3:16, 1 Chronicles 29:6-7a & 9, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have been recalling the early years of my life and the reality that I saw the church as a catastrophic, hypocritical, money grabbing waste. I was one of those who echoed the thoughts: "The church is just a bunch of hypocrites. All they want is your money so the preachers can line their pockets."

And, once again, it's my turn to stand before you and ask for money. Now, that's oversimplifying the message, but that's the way many see it: "'They're' asking us for more money." I'm convinced when someone who claims membership in this congregation sees it that way then this really isn't their church. Or, as some "members" have said to me when discussing Pilgrim: "Well, pastor, your church....". Your church? It's ours. And, more importantly, if we are striving to be faithful to Christ it's His.

And so, our direction . . .

WHY GIVE?

I. God Gave.

The Gospel lesson for this morning couldn't be any more simple; the words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)

God Gave. He gave Jesus to pay for the sins of sinners. He gave Jesus to secure forgiveness of our awful rebellion against Him - our thoughts and words and deeds. Jesus paid for every sin of every sinner at Calvary. He did that so we would not spend eternity wailing and gnashing our teeth in the darkest darkness; a place of unending burning and torment, without love and without hope. Forever!

I chose a Holy Week hymn for the sermon hymn because it precisely expresses what should be the driving force of our seeking to live for Christ. The third stanza: "Who is it, Lord, that bruised you?/ Who has so sore abused You/ And caused You all Your woe?/ We all must make confession/ Of sin and dire transgression/ While You no ways of evil know." You see? I must confess that of myself. I would hope that no one here - in this sanctuary - would say, or even suggest something like, "Well, yes, I understand, but everything is so negative." Well....the world is!

And then, there's the fourth stanza: "I caused Your grief and sighing/ by evils multiplying/ As countless as the sands./ I caused the woes unnumbered/ With which Your soul is cumbered,/ Your sorrows raised by wicked hands." Wicked hands. My hands. My sin.

And, once more, the fifth stanza: "Your soul in griefs unbounded,/ Your head with thorns surrounded,/ You died to ransom me./ The cross for me enduring,/ The crown for me securing,/ You healed my wounds and set me free."

There isn't a person walking the face of this earth who could remotely convince me that the object of life is this world. It's got some "nice" things. God gives me opportunity to serve it on His behalf - as He does every one of you. But the object of life is not this world. You caught that in the Gospel lesson, right? I mean, you know the Gospel text so I assume you grasp where it takes you? Not here. "God...**gave** his only Son, that (those of you who believe He is the One who died on the Cross and paid for your sin) should not perish but have eternal life."

God gave. And He continues to give. Forgiveness. Eternal life. Comfort. Hope. Reality. He gives and gives in the Word, in our Baptism and in His Supper; His Presence preparation for the life to come.

It's about as simple as it can be: We give out of response to our understanding and thankfulness for what God gave us in Christ. And more . . .

II. To Support His Work.

We give because He calls us to; to support His work which He has assigned us on earth. Listen to this portion from our Old Testament lesson:

Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and hundreds, and the officers of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. They gave for the service of the house of God.... Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly. (2 Chron. 29:6-7a,9)

Some more simple words. *They gave for the service of the house of God...offered freely to the Lord.* And the real kick: *Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly.* Is commentary really needed? Would any of us dare suggest that this was Old Testament stuff; it doesn't apply to the day?

It has been said, "Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and a universal provider of everything except happiness." Money. It's important - to a point. But when it pulls us away from joy and service in Christ to seeking joy and enslavement to this world its value is lost. At the end of the road, all that money has purchased will disappear.

It has been said, "Money is like manure. Stack it up and it stinks; spread it around and it makes things grow." That's what caused such rejoicing among the people in our Old Testament lesson. It's value was being invested in something of eternal significance.

And that's our goal here. To do everything possible in this very dark and stressful time to make sure we're working together for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that brings us to our final thought for this morning . . .

III. Because We're Stewards.

From 2 Corinthians 9:

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (vss. 6-8)

It's called *stewardship*. And stewardship defined is "the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care." Everyone in this place who lays a claim on Christ as their Lord and Savior is a Steward of everything God has given them. It's the old three T's: Time, Talent and Treasure. We don't "own" any of them. They are on loan to us from our very loving God. Got it? Our time and talents and treasure are on loan from God and can be taken away at any moment. And will be.

Our use of them is not a matter of the personal enjoyment we can drain out of this world. It isn't an issue of how much it's going to take to make you happy. It isn't a matter of getting to do this and that, or seeing this or that, or going here or there, or having this or that before you die. **It's a matter of accountability and keeping a trust which God has placed in your hands and mine, regardless of what we have or don't have.**

Christian writer Pearl Bartel wrote, "I fail or succeed in my stewardship of life in proportion to how convinced I am that life belongs to God." Isn't that correct? Your life - my life - belongs to God. He owns you. He owns me. It's the blood of Jesus that has cleansed us from our sin. In the water of Baptism He clothed us in Christ's perfect life. In the Holy Supper He feeds me forgiveness and eternal life. He owns me. And I owe Him everything - everything but excuses.

"Yes, but these are hard and uncertain times," many will say. So what? The times have always been hard and uncertain. But the question is, "How much harder and uncertain must they become before God's church reacts?" Back in 1980, a fellow by the name of Louis Cassels wrote, "If each church member in America (was) to suddenly go on welfare, and if each would then begin to give the Lord the 10 percent He asks for, the income of America's churches would be 35 percent higher than it is now."

And some will insist, "But God doesn't command the tithe, the 10 percent, in the New Testament." Correct. But - should we who have received the fullness of the Gospel, who have been given all things in Christ - should we conclude that somehow we should be able to give less?

We just sang the truth of that not too many minutes ago! Remember? "Your cords of love, my Savior,/ Bind me to You forever,/ I am no longer mine./ To You I gladly tender/ All that my life can render/ And all I have to You resign."

Do you agree? Or not? What will you do?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

STEWARDSHIP

November 9, 2014

St. John 3:16, I Chronicles 29:6-7a & 9, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8:

“Why Give?”

- I. God Gave.*
- II. To Support His Work.*
- III. Because We're Stewards.*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*