

“The Value of Giving: Time, Talent, Treasure”
Pentecost 25, Proper 28C – November 14, 2010
Isaiah 65:17-25; Canticle 9;
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19.

Introduction:

Today is the third Sunday we are examining the theme, “The Value of Giving” – looking at the value of giving as illustrated by Time, Talent, and Treasure. There is value in our giving – for others; and we receive value back – in this world, and the next. The first week Don Kennon gave a complete illustration of offering our talents to God. Last week, Jane Owens illustrated the value of giving your time to the purposes of the Kingdom of God through her own involvement with Boy Scouts and AWANA. Today, we are looking at the value of giving as illustrated in offering our Treasure back to God so it will serve the purposes of the Kingdom of God.

As I mentioned last week Time, Talent, and Treasure are not ends unto themselves. They are interwoven which makes it difficult to only be involved in one dimension of effective stewardship. They are also symbols of our attitude as stewards of the blessings God has given us; and servants of the Kingdom of God; and fellow-workers in Jesus’ Ministry of Reconciliation. In many ways, offering back to God our

Treasure Is The Hardest Sacrifice Of The Three.

Scripture declares that “God loves a cheerful giver”, but giving our time and talent is more often cheerfully given than our treasure. Yet, giving our treasure back to God is more often spiritually linked to the condition of our soul than our time and talent.

It is a truth that many pastors eventually learn, that the people who complain the loudest about everything in the church are too often some of the most miserly givers – of their time, their talent, and particularly their treasure. Why is that? Perhaps it is because “the love of money is the root of all evil”; and as Jesus said: “where your treasure is there also is your heart.”

When I first began to attend church, after being discharged from the Marine Corps, I would sit in the last pew, in the farthest corner from the pulpit. I was uncomfortable being there, and I didn’t want to be noticed, so I tried hard not to draw any attention to myself. After awhile, I began to become more involved in the life of the church. I started attending an adult Sunday School class, and I started attending the Men’s Suppers. I was giving more time; I was giving a little bit of talent; I was giving as little money as my conscience would allow. Most Sunday I would lay a \$5.00 bill in the offering plate. If I didn’t have

a five, I would give whatever one's I had. I was comfortable giving down from the five dollar level, but would never give up to a ten spot, or beyond. \$5.00 was my comfort level. I wasn't joyful about it, but I didn't suffer guilt either. Over time, I learned that

The Biblical Standard For Giving Treasure Is The Tithe.

Tithing is not a magical formula. It does not allow us to manipulate God; nor should it be viewed as an end in itself. Trusting God with our tithe is the entry point. Once we learn that all our time, talent and treasure belong to God, we go beyond tithing. One thing tithing accomplishes is it brings equity into the congregation. All of us cannot give the same amount of money because we do not all earn the same amount. However, all who tithe can sit in a position of equality in the council of the church. We are all in at a depth of giving ordained by God.

When I was first convicted in my heart to begin tithing, I did what many people do: first, I tried to negotiate with God about what a tithe means. Simply understood, a tithe is 10% of our gross income. If you earn \$20/ hour and work 40 hours, your gross is \$800.00. On that amount, the tithe would be \$80.00. Some have tried to negotiate that with God by saying they should only tithe on

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the amount they bring home, after taxes, insurance, retirement, Christmas Club, etc. That is a way to get started, but the Biblical tithe is on the “first fruits”. The tithe is off the top – the gross amount. Have you noticed the government takes its money off the top?

When that negotiation with God didn't work, my next approach was to prove to God that I couldn't afford to tithe. I wrote down on a piece of paper all my expenses: mortgage, gasoline, car payment, food, utilities, clothing, house repairs – you know the drill. When I was finished, I totaled the expenses and they added up to more than my take-home pay. Can any of you relate? Well, I held up my piece of paper to the ceiling to show God that it was impossible for me to begin tithing; God would have to be satisfied with my \$5.00 on the Sunday's I went to church.

Can you believe God was not impressed? The issue was not financial. The issue was ‘did I trust God’? So, in fear and trepidation, I wrote my first tithe check and dropped it in the offering plate, fully expecting soon to be in bankruptcy. Any of you ever had that fear?

Well, I don't know how God did it, but I never stopped tithing. Tithing, in faith, placed me in a different relationship with God. It was really a spiritual adventure. God changed my lifestyle. God changed my priorities.

God changed my heart and my 'want to's'.

Tithing, and seeing the power of God at work, deeply affected my life, and later, my ministry as a pastor. Not only do I tithe, we tithe as a congregation. Actually, we give away more than ten percent of our non-designated income. Tithing, and the trust in God it developed, has richly blessed my life. Tithing, and the trust in God it is developing, is blessing us as a congregation. With the Vestry's permission

I Therefore Make You a 'Money-Back Guarantee'.

It goes like this: if you are convicted by the Holy Spirit to step out in faith and being tithing; and you are not doing it because of guilt, or to impress anyone else, and you find that you cannot pay your bills, we will give you back your tithe minus what you were normally giving. It does us no good as a church to lead you into financial ruin. That doesn't bring glory to God. All you have to do is let me know that tithing is not working for you at this time and I'll get your money back – quickly. Got it?

Coming now to share his testimony with us about the value giving has brought to his life is James Cobb. James is a member of the Vestry and chairs our Outreach Ministry. As a former Junior Warden, James is also available to lend his talent to repair jobs around the

church. Additionally, James and Michelle are very active in the Kairos Prison Ministry.

James Testimony:

Let me begin by saying I have wondered about this for years every time I have heard a talk on stewardship. I have wanted to share my feelings and at times I really wanted to be up here doing just that. This particular time when Father Richard asked me if I would be willing to talk I told him yes. I actually thought he would ask me which segment I would be comfortable doing. I would not have chosen this one on "Treasure". I do however feel in my heart that he speaks daily with God and in turn listens for His direction. So here I am carrying the last leg of the Three Legged Stool!

To begin with I would like to change the name of this leg to "Living for Jesus"! Time, talent and treasure just does not quantify my true feelings about how I am supposed to live out my Christian walk with Him. I do believe we need to have a spiritually healthy balance to have a close relationship with God. To me true Christian Stewardship is Prayer, Sacrifice and Mercy.

Prayer should be the first and most important duty and joy of every single one of us. We have to establish a link with Jesus and God our Father. Without it you will not get His much needed guidance. We miss out on His strength to do good and avoid evil, and we miss His outpouring of blessings. All in all unless you submit to His authority and humble yourself to His will, you will never know how much you are missing out on. (Personal witness on prayer at prison). I tell everyone that God can

do more with one sweep of His hand than we could ever manage on our own. I have seen it too many times to count. Prayer is true treasure and there is where your heart should be. Whoever loves God prays.

Sacrifice is the second and next most important duty and joy of every beloved child of God. Christ offered the ultimate sacrifice to God – His own prayerful suffering and death for our sins on the cross. Whatever sacrifices we make in our lives for Him are mostly poor attempts at self-denial. Prayer and sacrifice combined are a powerful force in the world. Are you getting what you ask for in your prayers? Add fasting to the equation as your self-denial and see how God honors your commitment.

Mercy is essential to the life of every sinner who hopes to eventually enter into the Kingdom of God and Eternal life with Him. All I want is one hug from Jesus when I get there and hear Him say, I know you tried! Blessed are the merciful for they will obtain mercy. Think about that? To obtain mercy we must give it. Forgiving injury and insult, doing good for those who would mean us harm and by praying and sacrificing for those in need, be they friend or foe. The practice of mercy includes offering our time and talents to those in spiritual or physical need. **“Tithing”**. What does the Bible say about Christian tithing?

Many Christians including myself, have and continue to struggle with this. For the longest time I felt that I gave so much of my time and talent to His service that I didn't need to worry about this. Of course I gave but it was never sacrificially. It was more like Kenny Chesney says in one of his songs.

Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven lyrics

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Preacher told me last Sunday mornin'
Son, you better start livin' right
You need to quit the women and whiskey
And carrying on all night

Don't you wanna hear him call your name
When you're standin' at the pearly gates
I told the preacher, "Yes I do"
But I hope they don't call today
I ain't ready

Everybody wants to go to heaven
Have a mansion high above the clouds
Everybody want to go to heaven
But nobody want to go now

Said preacher maybe you didn't see me
Throw an extra twenty in the plate
There's one for everything I did last night
And one to get me through today
Here's a ten to help you remember
Next time you got the good Lord's ear
Say I'm comin' but there ain't no hurry
I'm havin' fun down here

That was me, giving with a motive, not from the heart as Christ gave for me. Some people say that we as Christians are not bound by the Old Testament external requirements of the Jewish law, such as circumcision, avoiding certain foods, keeping a Saturday Sabbath and observing Jewish holy days. So are we bound by the ancient Jewish law requiring that 10% of one's goods or income be given to God? I personally don't feel Christians

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are required to give a set specific percentage of their income to the church or other charity. I have not found anywhere that Jesus said anything about it except, Render unto Caesar what is his and give to God what is Gods. One of the best-known stories of the New Testament is the one concerning the tribute money question: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?" Christ's answer, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are Gods" (Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26), is one of the most familiar sentences of Scripture. Christ's assertion of His messiahship was seen by his accusers as a denial of Caesar's right to tax (Luke 23:2), since the Messiah as King had to have exclusive sovereignty, in their perspective. For Jesus to have denied Caesar's right to tax Israel was a mark of insurrection and would make Him liable to arrest. For Jesus to have affirmed Caesar's right to tax would have been, in the eyes of the people, a denial of His messiahship. In researching this I found that Jesus asked for a Denarius which is a small silver coin that was used to pay the tax. He asked for it not because he didn't have one, but to show to everyone who was trying to trap him that they had them already. Their whole purpose was to trap Him and it didn't work.

So now if we are not bound by the law what should we do? Give as the Grace of God guides you to give, and do not count the cost nor figure out the percentage. Those who look up their incomes and give only according to that amount are failing to imitate Christ and failing to trust in God. I say that we should all give as the Mercy of God guides you to give and never count the cost. A much

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higher cost has already been paid on our behalf by Jesus Christ willingly, sacrificially, mercifully and most of all lovingly. Without that we have absolutely nothing to look forward too. Do you think that 10% of your income will buy you a seat in heaven? Does sitting down in the garage make you a car? Will showing up here every Sunday morning and parking in that pew make you a Christian? Absolutely not to all three questions!

Maybe we could install an ATM machine at the back of the church! Maybe we could have Charlie or Bill count the offering right after it is given to see if it's enough? Put a finger in a vise until you commit fully?

(Example of how some have to give up). Scotty Soares on the day he was arrested.

Ok, we will not be doing any of these things. So how do we maintain the viable functioning of Holy Cross Episcopal Church? I say by getting out of our comfort zones and searching deep down inside our hearts. We prayerfully, earnestly, sacrificially, mercifully and humbly ask God what He thinks we should give. I can tell you from the bottom of my heart, you cannot out give God, period. My wife and I have been blessed beyond our wildest imagination. When I do stop and think about what we set aside for our Church home I don't know how we do it. We have just increased our giving every year even when we didn't think we could and God has honored our efforts every single time. I don't know what God has in store for us in the future, but I hope and pray every day that I can find a way to live for Him always.

Matthew 25:14 – 30 is the parable of the Talents. It's the one where the master is going away and leaves

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some Gold with three servants. He gives five bags to the first one, two bags to the second and one bag to the third. The first one invests his gold and soon it has doubled. The second one does the same and soon it has doubled. The third one however hid his money out of fear that he would lose it. He had no intention on keeping it and returned it as soon as his master asked for it. His fear originated, at least partly, from the lack of trust that comes from not knowing God. He did not know his benevolent master, and was not in his master's service. He was simply keeping something for someone, an act that cost him nothing and did not engage him in a relationship. I guess one of the most important lessons Chelle and I have learned is that our gifts are not our own. When we did the Crown Ministries course several years ago we gave back all our possessions to God. We changed our perspective on how we look at the things we have, the things we want and the blessings we receive. We love to serve Him and talk quite frequently about where and what God might have next for us to do. The coolest part is when you submit to his authority and say here it is Lord, do as you see fit. He honors that. He multiplies what you give beyond your expectations. You are no use to anyone if you are not will to risk sharing it.

I know when my focus shifted from what's good for me, to serving Jesus wherever and whenever he wants, my life changed for the good. I discovered something beautiful. I began to share in my master's happiness. I experienced a new kind of joy in my whole life. When we say yes to Jesus and begin to work for the Kingdom, we experience the abundant life that Christ

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offers (John 10:10). **The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly".**

When we say yes to him, life begins.

Now I say to you, are you using your gifts and talents to serve God? Do you trust Him enough to give Him control of all your worldly possessions?

In the Stewardship packet we all received, Father Richard made you a money back guarantee. I pray everyone will begin with this in mind as we prepare for filling them out. Holy Cross has spent _____ more this year so far to date than we have brought in. We do not have the cash reserves to do that again next year. I ask everyone to consider a day of collective sacrificial fasting, in prayer, to God genuinely asking Him to reveal to you what you should give. Not born from the ancient Jewish laws, but from the heart. Believing that you cannot out give God and claiming Him as Lord and savior in all your affairs. I honestly feel if we as a church body submit to God, humbling ourselves by collectively fasting together, and genuinely seeking His will for us, He will honor it.
AMEN?