

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

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Scripture: Various

"Giving"

One thing I know that we can all agree on is that God is Lord of everything - the universe and all is in it; our lives, and everything that we have. We have been put in charge as stewards of God's creation, our bodies and everything we have - but we are not owners! When someone is the owner of something they have rights, while a steward only has responsibilities because the steward has been delegated by the owner to take care of his possessions.

Probably the most difficult message for any pastor to bring before his congregation is one about "giving." One Sunday morning a pastor encouraged his congregation to consider the potential of their church. He told them "with God's help we can see the day when this church will go from crawling to walking. Well, the people enthusiastically responded "let the church walk, pastor, let the church walk!" He continued "and when the church begins to walk, next the church can begin to run!" The people shouted "let the church run, pastor, let the church run." The pastor continued "and finally the church can move from running to flying. Oh, the church can fly! But of course it's going to take a lot of money for that to happen!" The congregation grew quiet, and from the back of the church someone mumbled "Let the church walk, pastor, let the church walk!"

When a message about "giving" is brought before the church – it usually takes one of these forms:

- **Money is never talked about.** The pastor is afraid to broach the subject and so it is never mentioned.
- The second form is to the other extreme – **money is always the topic of conversation** and the need for people to give to this and that function, work, or ministry. Many of us have been a part of such churches like that.
- The third approach - tithing and giving is talked about with a lot of Scriptures to back it up, but the emphasis is all about **what you can receive by giving**. This is known as the "**health, wealth and prosperity gospel**" and you sometimes see these evangelists on TV. In all honesty, God does bless us in our giving – but I believe the emphasis of this approach is all wrong. **We don't give to receive! We give in grateful obedience.**
- Then there is the fourth form. Our wealth and how we use it is looked at through the entire witness of Holy Scripture. **Tithing and stewardship are taught and encouraged but it is not harped upon, neglected, or twisted - to meet our own desires.** We are reminded about it on occasion – but we don't dwell on it. It is important for us to know what the Bible says about it in much the same way that we have to remind our children to eat their vegetables. It is important for us to be reminded of what God's Word says about our wealth and how we are to use it.

So what does the Bible teach concerning wealth? Well we know it is all God's in the first place. He is really just lending it to us. Just like everyone is born with certain talents, and given certain gifts and some people have more than others, just as it is with our places in society.

Living here in America we truly are blessed. But we need to remember that Jesus cautions in Luke 12:48 *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded."* Think of the poor widow in the gospel (Luke 21:1-4; Mark 12:41-44) who gives her only two small copper coins to the treasury but Jesus said she gave more than all of the other people. The others gave out of their abundance but she gave out of her need. It is not the amount you have that matters, it is how you use it. And the Bible is clear on how we are to use our wealth. I want to suggest to you five things that we need to remember.

- **First, work hard and honestly.** If you can work, do it with vigor and to God's glory. God created us to work. He gave Adam and Eve the world and everything in it to explore, tend to it, and take care of it. The Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 3:23: that *"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."* In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 there were some people expecting that Jesus was coming back soon, and so they quit working. Paul rebukes them and tells them to get back to work!
- **Second, plan carefully** - Jesus said in Luke: 14:28-30: *"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'"*
- **Third**, and in this day and age it might be the hardest - **save diligently.** We need to put some of our money away. 1 Corinthians 16:2: *"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."* 10% is a good number to save. You may remember in Genesis – the Pharaoh of Egypt had a dream that really troubled him. Joseph interpreted that dream for him and told him that there would be seven years of famine after seven years of abundance, and that they needed to store up the grain when the famine would hit. The Pharaoh listened to Joseph, and put him in charge so that food was available during the hard times. We need to save because we don't know the future.
- **Fourth, we should spend wisely** – taking care of **our needs first** and **then our wants.** God tells us to take care of the poor, the widowed and the orphaned. It is why things like education, medicine, and ministry are so important. We should be all about caring for people. Jesus said in Matthew 6, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:19-21)

- **Fifth, and most important, give generously.** We need to remember that the tithe is not just about money or you might say “our treasure” – but it is also of our time and talents.

Did you know that the words, “give,” “given,” or “gave” are found 2,039 times in the Bible!?! God is a God of detail and numbers – and He reminds us symbolically through numbers.

- Many of us know that the number 7 is the number of completion or perfection;
- The number 6 is the number of imperfection – there were 6 days of work, and we all know about 666.
- The number 3 is wholeness – and that is in itself a whole sermon – maybe for another day!
- The number 12 is significant in the number of tribes of Israel and the apostles. In today’s Holy Gospel – how many baskets of leftovers were there after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes? 12!
- It shouldn't surprise any of us that **the number ten in the Bible is the number of testing.**
 - 10 is a psychologically satisfying number. You don’t hear about “top 9 lists” but we do hear about “**top 10 lists.**”
 - We have **10 fingers and 10 toes.**
 - God promises Abraham that He will not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if only **10 righteous people** could be found there. You know what happened.
 - God called Abraham to give **a tithe or a tenth** to the priest of Salem, Melchizadek. The word tithe literally means “ten,” and ten percent made up a full offering in the Bible. A tithe is also referred to as the “*first fruits,*” giving to God the best we have to offer. Jesus Himself upheld the principle of the tithe in Matthew 23:23. He proclaimed “*Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.*”
 - As we just reviewed during our Wednesday night Adult Education - there were **10 Plagues** that tested the Pharaoh and Egypt to see if they would let the people of Israel free from slavery. The *Ten Commandments* were the foundation of God's law and were given as a test for God's people to see whether or not they would follow God's law. **It was a test of obedience.**
 - Then there were **the ten lepers?** Jesus came upon ten lepers on His way and told them to show themselves to the priests and as they did so, they actually were healed on the way to the Temple! But only one came back and thanked Jesus for the healing. (Luke 17:12) **This was a test of gratitude.**
 - And then Jesus gave the **Parable of the Ten Virgins** who were waiting for the bridegroom as an illustration of being ready for His return. Five virgins kept oil for their lamps. The other five didn’t even bother to take any oil. The bridegroom was delayed so those who did not bring enough oil missed the bridegroom when they left to get more oil for their lamps. **This was a test of the readiness.**

The number 10 is the number of testing. I would like to share with you Malachi 3:10-12. God tells the Prophet Malachi *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. ¹¹ I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty. ¹² “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.”* (Malachi 3:10-12)

This is the only place in all of Scripture where God commands us to test Him! God tests us to see if we are willing to test Him. The truth is - this is also the antidote to covetousness. We all know the tenth commandment, *“Thou shall not covet.”* We are called to not desire that which is not our own. If the tithe is the Lord's, then why do we keep it from Him? The principle of tithing delivers us from the spirit of greed and selfishness. As God gives to us, we are to be givers to Him and to others. Jesus said, *“Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down and running over.”*

The fact is God's command to tithe is a test. It is a test of our faith; it is a test of our obedience; it is a test of the stewardship of what God has given us. And when we recognize it is a test of faith, it is an opportunity for us to test God knowing full well that God will respond just as He promised He would. When we understand the tithe - we understand the principle, the blessing and the need. For if God's people don't give, God's work does not get done. So I encourage you to consider the Lord's charge - to give back what is rightfully His - the tithe.

A tithe serves two purposes. It supports the Church, and, more importantly, a tithe is a symbolic gesture that all that we have really belongs to God. Tithing is a spiritual action. Today, it reminds us that Jesus is Lord of our lives, and that trust in Him.

When stewardship is discussed in churches, **the three T's mentioned** are **Time, Talent, and Treasure**. You might even hear people comment “oh, it is just another talk about money.” Stewardship is the offering of our **entire selves to God**. God gives us all our time, talents and treasure – it is suggested that we should give back to Him the *first fruits* of these gifts. God gave us His first fruits – Jesus, His Son.

And so I ask you - what would it look like to give God 10% of our time? In a 24-hour day, that adds up to almost two and a half hours (2 hours, 24 minutes) of time given directly to God. God does not just want our money – He wants our hearts! God wants us to show Him that we are in love with Him, and that He is in first place in our lives. Tithing of our treasure, without giving God our talent, and perhaps more valuable, our time, is empty, like a husband who gives his wife lavish gifts but never spends any time with her. That my friends is a hollow relationship!

As you prayerfully consider your pledge of time, talent and treasure to the Lord for the coming year, I pray that Jesus will instruct your heart, will speak clearly to you, and that He will enable

Twenty Third Sunday After Trinity, November 23, 2014, Year A

you to cheerfully pledge to give back to Him the first-fruits of all that He has given to you. I need to mention that if you are unable to meet the full tithe – then I would ask you to seek the Lord's help in working towards that with whatever you are able to do.

Our God is Faithful, He is the provider of everything that we have (and will have), and He will be faithful to provide for His work in and through St. Andrew's. Our responsibility is to be faithful to Him, and to walk in obedience to His instruction. May you have ears to hear His voice, and courage to trust and obey the ONE who is always worthy of our trust. To the LORD: Father, Son and Holy Spirit be all the Glory and all of the Praise!