

In our gospel lesson Jesus basically tells his listening audience to be careful to “walk the walk” and not just “talk the talk” as they follow the teaching of God. Let’s explore that theme within the context of our stewardship season. This month the St. Paul Finance Committee and Church Council ask us to prayerfully consider our financial support of the church for the coming year. Prayers and giving are two parts of our membership vows as United Methodist as we commit to support St. Paul with our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

Giving to God and the Body of Christ, the church, flows naturally when it emerges from a sense of thankfulness. Let’s consider some points of thankfulness that persons of faith have maintained over the ages. A beginning point for gratitude drives us all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. Genesis 1, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...” As we read the opening chapter of Genesis we realize that creation is a gift we have received from God Almighty, a gift given to us without a price. God is generous and for that I am grateful. Every day that Marjorie and I go out for a walk I occasionally stop to just take in the beauty of God’s creation. This time of year my awe is found in the multi-colored leafs on the trees and the ongoing realization that those trees give me the oxygen that I need to breathe. Creation, a gift from God, gives me a humble heart knowing that I can never out give God but I also know our generous God is pleased when we show signs of generosity as well.

Thankfulness and responding with generosity is walking the walk of stewardship.

Giving to God and the Body of Christ sometimes comes to pass because of positive results that we have experienced in life. As we turn over to the 14th chapter of Genesis we see the origin of the concept of the tithe. Abraham, who we call the Father of faith in the Hebrew-Christian tradition, had a great victory in battle. He is so happy that he won that battle and he wants to express thanks to God. So Abraham joins in a victory dinner with Melchizedek who is noted to be a priest of God Most High. In Genesis 14:19-20 we read Melchizedek blessed Abraham and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him one tenth of everything.” Out of thankfulness for positive results in life Abram shares a gift to God. Abram walked the walk of stewardship.

As we turn over to the 26th chapter of Deuteronomy we find the children of Israel sharing first fruits and tithes to God in thankfulness for their new home. You remember that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for centuries. Then God works through Moses, his wife Miriam, his brother Aaron and eventually Joshua to relocate the children of Israel from servitude in Egypt to freedom and abundance in the Promised Land. With hearts of thankfulness the Israelites share the first fruits of their harvest at the worship center in their community. With their gifts they walked the walk of stewardship.

Giving to God and the Body of Christ, the church, sometimes comes to pass because of positive results that we have experienced in life. Our financial support is an expression of thankfulness. Yet, at other times our thankfulness is in response to God’s grace and forgiveness. This seemingly occurs for Zacchaeus as he experiences the warmth of God’s love when Jesus visits his home. Let’s pick up that story in the 19th chapter of the gospel of Luke. “When Jesus came to that place he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.’ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, ‘He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.’” Then there is a gap in the story. We don’t know what Jesus said to Zacchaeus and vice-versa while they were in the house because the narrative does not tell. We just know that up to this point Jesus had taught the crowds about God’s grace with stories about the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. We just know that Zacchaeus had a reputation as being a sinner and that he desperately wanted to see Jesus as he climbed a sycamore tree to do so. Then there is a gap in the story but we do see that Zacchaeus response to whatever happened is an extraordinary

expression of generosity as he says that he will give half of all owns to the poor. With a thankful and grace filled heart he walked the walk of stewardship.

Like Zacchaeus our giving to God and the Body of Christ, the church, is as a result of our thankfulness for the divine grace and forgiveness. We remember that Jesus could have taken a different route but while he was in prayer following the Last Supper he said, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42). Paul reflects on the crucifixion of Jesus in the fifth chapter of the letter to the Romans when he writes, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person some might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8). Our giving is an expression of thankfulness for the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. That is walking the walk of stewardship.

Giving to God and the Body of Christ, the church, flows naturally when it emerges from a sense of thankfulness. We have much to be thankful for here at St. Pau United Methodist Church. We can be thankful that we have a building is that is used for many community activities each and every week. We can be thankful for Sunday School classes for children and a variety of Bible studies for adults that establish and maintain a firm foundation for faith filled living. We can be thankful for this sanctuary that hosts weekly worship as well as milestone events like baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and sending forth memorial services. This is a sacred space. We can be thankful for the fellowship we have after worship, through the UMW, Circle meetings, UMM, youth fellowship groups, and other fellowship groups. We have so much for which to give thanks.

Giving to God and the Body of Christ, the church, flows naturally when it emerges from a sense of thankfulness and that is walking the walk of stewardship.

I invited us to ponder your thankfulness this morning as we prayerfully consider our financial support of our church in the upcoming year. Please hear these words from Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians. He writes, "The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9:6-7). God loves a cheerful giver and what a joy it is to give. It is good to walk the walk of stewardship with a smile on our face and joy in our heart.

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