

Our stewardship theme for this coming year is “Glorifying God through Our Giving.” This theme comes right out of St. Paul’s 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, the 9th chapter. Here, he is talking with the Corinthian Christians about stewardship and giving. In the course of the conversation he tells them that they can do an incredible thing through their giving—they can glorify God. And so can we!

In our Gospel reading for today’s Eucharist, our Lord Jesus Christ uses the image of the employer/employee relationship in order to teach us something about the nature of our relationship with God and our work in his kingdom.

When a person is hired to do a job and that job is accomplished; does that person deserve any special recognition? Of course not! Why? It is because that person is just doing their duty. Now the same thing is true of our relationship to God and our work in his kingdom. And so at the end of the reading our Lord says, “So also for you, when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘We are ordinary servants, we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:10)

What is our duty when it comes to our giving? Or better yet, what does God’s Word tell us? The biblical benchmark, the biblical standard for giving for God’s people is the *tithe*. It is giving back to God: 10% of 100% of what he has first given us. This is done both as a way of giving thanks to God for all the blessings of this life and also as a spiritual discipline.

We read about the tithe in Malachi 3:10, “‘Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test’, says the Lord of hosts, ‘and see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.’” Luther reminds us that every time God gives a command, he attaches a blessing. The command is to tithe and the promise is that God will bless our giving.

When it comes to tithing, people usually have two questions; and these are good questions. The first question: Isn’t giving the tithe risky? The second question: Doesn’t it take a lot of faith to tithe?

Is tithing risky? One way to answer is to remind ourselves that it is even riskier not to tithe. How so? Zig Ziglar, American author and motivational speaker, once said that it is risky every time a plane takes off, but that is what planes are meant to do. Furthermore, it’s even riskier for a plane to sit on the ground and rust. So too for us; it’s risky to tithe, but it’s even more risky not to tithe. God has created us in his image. God is a generous giver. So when we become generous givers, we become more like Him. God loves it when we become more like Him!

The second question: Pastor, but doesn’t this tithing thing take a lot of faith? Our Lord addresses this issue in the 1st half of the Gospel reading. The disciples asked the Lord to increase their faith. Our Lord responds, “When it comes to faith—size doesn’t count.” Actually, He says, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and

planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. (Luke 17:6) In other words, even a little God-given faith enables you to become a generous giver which in turn, glorifies Him.

One more thing about faith, it is only as strong as its source. What do I mean by that? Even if you have faith as tall as a mountain, that the ice on the lake, which is only ½ inch thick, will support your weight; what's going to happen when you walk out on that ice? You are going to fall right through! However, if you had only a tiny amount of faith in ice that is 12 inches thick, then you are going to be able to walk out on the ice with no problems. You are going to be able to drive your car or truck out on that ice and it will support you without trouble, nothing is going to happen. The point is that the power of faith isn't related to how much of it you have, it comes from its source.

And so what our Lord is saying is this: You have a God who can move mountains, you have a God who created the entire universe out of nothing, you have a God who has made a decision and He will not rest until He has redeemed all humankind and made all things new. Now if your faith is in that God, you don't need more faith, you just need to take what faith that God has already given you and do your duty. Just take the faith that God has given you and fulfill the potential that God has given you to be a generous giver and glorify him through your giving.

What gets in the way of our glorifying God through our giving? The answers are many: a lack of financial discipline, laziness, selfishness, etc. A financial survey of families earning \$50,000 to \$75,000 revealed that they give an average of 1.5% of their annual income to charity or their local church, whereas they spent 10% to 11% of their income on such things as pleasure, leisure and vacations. I wonder if this is annoying to God.

You see, every nickel, dime and dollar you spend is important to God. Why? Because it is all His! And He has entrusted you with all the blessings of your life and He calls you to manage all those blessings for Him and his kingdom while we are in this world.

Does God care about you? You bet he does! He wants you to be able to provide for your families. He wants you to be able to put a roof over your head. He wants you to have a decent life. But, He also wants to be the #1 priority in our lives. And so God calls us to be tithers and generous givers. Why? So that He doesn't end up at the bottom of our priority list.

What will we be able to do for the ministry and mission of Christ in 2015? Well, it depends. It depends on your willingness to step out in faith; it depends on your willingness to trust God's promise to bless your giving; it depends on your willingness to do your duty and fulfill the great potential that God has given you to be a generous giver by tithing so that you might do something quite incredible—and that is to glorify God through our giving. AMEN.

+Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam+ (TO THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD)