How is your pie divided?

As a teacher I grew accustom to very bright students asking questions they thought would stump me and my peers. Usually the questions had originally been difficult for them, but somehow, they learned the answer and wanted to test their teachers. Never mind it might have taken them a long time to get the answer. They expected us to be able to answer immediately. Questions like: where does weight go when you lose it? Or, why is a building called a building if it’s already built? And so, if we couldn’t answer right then, with all the sarcasm they could muster up, you would hear, “I thought you all knew everything”.

Today’s gospel reminds me of those precious days. Jesus knew the Pharisees would not have an answer to the question before he even asked it. Obviously, the Pharisees wanted to be reminded that loving your neighbor as yourself is a difficult task. They surely were not loving Jesus as they loved themselves. And it is obvious they didn’t realize that loving each other grows out of our love for God. On our own, we can never fulfill Jesus’ command to love each other. What needs to be understood here is yes, we must love God and love our neighbors, but the bigger picture here is, God calls us to do difficult task. Jesus’ question to the Pharisees was difficult to answer. The conversation in today’s Scripture passage is just one of a number of debates and teachings that take place on this day, which is just three days before He was crucified. Just prior to this conversation, He had silenced two different groups of people who had tried to trap Him in His words. And then the Pharisees came up to Jesus for one more crack at Him, and they ask Him a question that was actually a frequent topic of discussion and debate among the religious leaders themselves. Now what that tells me is God’s commandments or law in this case was a difficult task to live out and understand. You would think it would be easy to understand these two laws. You would think they would have no trouble loving God. I fully get the trouble with loving your neighbor because some of our neighbors make it difficult to love them with their excessive complaining, overall grumpiness and meanness. But I don’t get their difficulty in understanding loving God.

This issue of loving God, literally shapes how we live out our Christian life and it should have shaped the lives of the Pharisees. Whether it’s a life of substance, meaning, purpose, and effectiveness for God, or whether it’s just another life of someone who had priorities that don’t include God or else put Him at the bottom. It should not have been difficult to understand we are born to praise and love God. Which allows me the opportunity to ask how is your life pie divided? So often we tend to compartmentalize our lives. This is our work part, this is our play part, this is my family part, this is my money part, (usually the smallest slice), this is my political part, this is my God part.

We try to fool ourselves into thinking that we can just separate these different parts of our lives and they won’t impact any other part. And the area that folks really try to do that in is the “God” part. Most folks are fine thinking, “Okay God, I’ll let you have Sundays. But that’s it. That’s my ‘God Day,’ and any more than that will stress me out, let that be enough. I don’t want you getting into my work part, my family part, and I especially don’t want you getting into my money part.”

But according to Jesus, that’s not the way God wants it. He wants the whole pie. He doesn’t want just the “God” part, whatever that is in your life. We heard Rev Liz say last Sunday that all we have belongs to God. When we are dividing our life pie, I would venture to guess that most folks don’t even carve out enough to have a “God” part. They think about God rarely,

 if at all, and if they do think of Him, they’re likely to just give Him the scraps of their lives. He deserves the best we have to offer, not the leftovers. How we love God makes all the difference in our enjoyment of God and all His benefits.

I read one of those infamously funny church signs not too long ago that stated, “Church work would be a lot easier if it weren’t for people.” But church work is about people. The advancement of God’s kingdom is all about people. It’s about people giving of their time, their resources and treasures to ensure longevity of the church and the work it is called to do. I am not going to ask you to widen the slice of pie that indicates what you give to the church because heaven is going bankrupt. But I will ask you to prayerfully consider widening the slice because it will provide sustainability to a place that has spiritually nourished you and will allow that nourishment to feed others in future years. God is asking these questions: what have you done for me lately? I give you life, health, and supply all of your needs, what are you willing to give me? I love you unconditionally, are you willing to love yourself enough so that love can shine through towards others? Yes, this is difficult, but what if I gave you nothing? Allow me to leave you with a story called: "Who Owns Your French Fries". It is the story of a man who buys his little boy some French fries. Then the father does what all fathers do, he reaches over and takes one French fry to taste it. The little boy slaps his father’s hand and says, "Don’t touch my French fries." The father thinks that his son is selfish. The father knows that he bought the French fries and they belong to him. The father knows that his son belongs to him. The father could get angry and never buy his son another French fry again to teach his son a lesson, or the father could "bury" his son in French fries. The father thinks, "Why is my son selfish, I have given him a whole package of French fries; I just want one French fry." God has given us money, when He asks for a tithe, people figuratively slap His hand and say, "Keep Your hands off my money." God owns everything we have. He wants us: 1. To manage what we have for His glory. God expects us to manage our time to be sure we give some to him through prayer and worship, to manage our talent he has given us to render an offering that makes heaven rejoice, our bodies so they become a temple fit for God to reside within, to provide testimony for the great things he has done in our lives and the lives of others and to share those treasures that our near and dear to our hearts remembering what Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” 2. To give back a portion of what he has given us. Asking for only a portion is another way God shows he is a gracious and loving God. In the silence of the day when you are trying to figure out how to slice your pie, listen to our father in heaven again asking, what if I gave you nothing?