

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

Psalm 111

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

10/13/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

11On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. 15Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Stewardship!

Good Morning! I'll be honest with you from the start, we're going to do two things in today's sermon that most people don't like: we are going to talk about money, and I'm going to ask you to discuss a question with each other. So, now that you have been warned, let's jump right in!

It seems like I have had the same conversation countless times. I meet a fellow Christian who tells me the story of some pastor or priest from a congregation that they attended growing up who has angered the Christian because of a sermon that was given where the pastor or priest has used guilt and bullying to try and get the congregation to give more money. Every time I hear this I'm amazed that there exist clergy out there who can make such a mistake. It has always influenced how I try to talk about money in a sermon, but I recently started to wonder if maybe the problem was with the delivery of the message. So, I need you to tell me what you hear me say in today's sermon. Come up after and let me know if what you hear is a similar message like that of the pastor or priest, or if you hear one of invitation, excitement, and worship.

Every year we hand out pledge cards, or as it's trendy to call them now, estimate of giving cards. We do this because it helps us hold ourselves accountable. A few weeks after we hand them out we collect them on what we call Consecration Sunday. We pray and give thanks for the pledges. And that is what we'll be doing in just a short time. But first we need to travel back in time.

Years ago, when I was but a young lad, I grew up in a congregation that didn't do pledge cards. So, it was never part of my church experience. My grandma took me to church, and we would get a buck or two from our parents to throw into the plate. As I got older and was able to drive myself to church, I got a job! So I sometimes had some cash, and so the money that was put into the plate became my own money. It was usually a five dollar bill, MAYBE a \$10 on special occasions. It's not that I wasn't generous, giving and gifts have always been one of my love languages, I just didn't think I needed to give more. The congregation I grew up in had millions from gifts to the church, so what was my little bit of cash going to do anyway?

What I didn't understand at the time was that our giving isn't about the congregation, it is about our own faith. And even though we use the language of "gift," it's not a gift at all! Everything we have has already been given to us first! That is why I love the language of being stewards, what we care for is not our own. God doesn't need our money, as it says in the Gospel of Matthew "*...for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*"¹ What we give, whether it be our time, ourselves, or our money, is about growing our own faith.

One of the things I try to do, especially on Consecration Sunday, is to be more open and honest about money. So in the past I've told you what Megan and I owe in debt, why we owe, and what percentage we've pledged. But I think I've been hedging my bets. While I think my debt is an important part of what we can give, I think I was subconsciously hiding behind it. So this year, I'll just tell you what we have given. As of

¹ Matthew 3:9 NRSV

the end of September, Megan and I have given \$2,767.78. Because we give online through the website it takes a little bit off the top and we end up with the .78 cents.

We pledged around \$260 a month as our regular giving and \$75 a month to the capital maintenance fund. Next year, we will try to increase the percentage of our pledge. (Although it may have to come down seeing as Thomas Nelson Community College is going to fire a bunch of employees they can't afford anymore.) Megan especially has given over and above with her time and talents. We do all of this because giving is our way of serving God's church, and when we give, we feel drawn closer to God. I share all this, not because I'm trying to brag, I wish we gave more, but because we live in a culture that has fed us the lie that we shouldn't talk about money. Mary Ann Smith grew up in a church that published what every member gave! Can you imagine that! Don't worry, we won't be doing that. But I do want us to try and answer a few questions. Break off and talk to someone near you about the following questions, don't worry! I'm not asking you to share how and what you give. We'll spend a few minutes on this. The questions are:

1. Why do you give money to the church?
2. Why don't we talk about what we give in the church?

Ok. I hope that was helpful. I heard some very similar things, and it centered around the idea that you give because you are thankful for what God has already given to you AND you give because you believe in the ministry of this congregation. This is an important thing to remember. The money that goes to pay our electric bill isn't just a

utility cost. It's a missional tool! With our electricity we are able to provide a space for two different AA groups to meet twice a week! We allow a Boy Scout troop to foster growth in young adults. And all of that is possible because you believe in the ministry of this place! I want to end this sermon reiterating a few things. I don't want you to give because you feel guilty or out of some misguided obligation. What you give won't earn your way into heaven, serving on every team and group won't change it either. We give because Jesus Christ has given himself to us first. Everything we have is from God. Our offertory prayer is one of my favorites because it reminds me that nothing I have is my own! *"Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time, and our possessions."*² So, today, I hope you have heard a message of grace and love, not a sermon on guilt and shame. I end with the rest of our offertory prayer: *"Use us, God, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen."*³

² The Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 107

³ Ibid