

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

28th Sunday of Quarantine (29th Overall)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Consecration Sunday)

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Psalms 25:1-9

Philippians 2:1-13

Matthew 21:23-32

09/27/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

23When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." 27So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

28"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. 30The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

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

Stewardship

Good morning! As a pastor, I am blessed with a wonderful amount of trust from the people of this community. And I'm not alone, pastors in general remain privy to some of the most intimate and private moments of people's lives. When my grandfather died my pastor was at my house with my family when my parents returned from the hospital. When a person is at their lowest they give the pastor a call. When someone gets bad news from the doctor, a pastor gets a call. And we are often included in good news too! When a couple decides to get married a pastor is part of the planning, and guides the couple in premarital coaching. We also baptize children, finding out before others that a couple is expecting. And if a couple hits a roadblock in their relationship, it's the pastor who is usually the one who is first contacted to help them navigate the problem. Colleagues of mine have been a part of some hard moments. A pastor is usually one of the first to hear about infidelity in a marriage, or thoughts of suicide.

Like I said, we're a part of some of the most private thoughts and moments a person in the church can experience, which is why it's so weird that people don't want the pastor to know what they give to the church. Think about how bizarre that is. People are more likely to share EVERYTHING about themselves except for what they give to the church.

I am convinced that we need to break the strange cycle of secrecy in our culture that forbids us from talking about money. As I talked Monday with those at Bible study they said that one of the things they enjoyed was my honesty with my own struggle to reach a 10% tithe but they wish I didn't need to share what I was giving. But my silence only allows the problem to grow. So, last year Megan and I pledged \$360 a month between our regular pledge and what we give to capital maintenance. That works out to \$4,320 for the year. So, even if we wanted to keep my pledge the "same" we would need to increase our pledge by 1.7% to cover inflation, which would mean we would need to add \$72 to our pledge. For 2021 Megan and I are just as unsure as everyone else about

what the future holds, but we've decided to increase our pledge by \$20 a month, which will work out to \$4,560. This will also include gifts of our time and our talents.

The church often spends a lot of time talking about money, and about our need for cash to do the ministry we have committed ourselves to, but often leave out the time and talents gift. But we need all of it to get things done at St. Paul's. We need the gifts that each and every one of you has to do God's work. The reality is that it's often the issue of money that remains the hardest for all of us. If a member of the church calls you and asks for help with an event you're likely to say yes, but we all struggle with giving financially.

One of the biggest hurdles for all of us, including myself, is to realize that every single thing that we say is "ours" is actually a gift from God. Even the air we breathe is a gift from God. So, as Karen Otto said, the challenge isn't for us to decide how much of "our" stuff to give to God, but how much of God's gifts to hold back. That certainly puts an interesting spin on things, doesn't it?

We often forget how much of an impact our giving has on the world. In one month we raised over \$3,000 for HELP (Hampton Ecumenical Lodgings and Provisions), of which \$500 was enough to fill an entire freezer chest with meat and protein for people who come in for food. The letter that was sent out to the congregation showed you the graphic on where your offering goes, how it impacts not just our local community but goes to support the ministry of the Virginia Synod and the ELCA! Heck, in the few years that we have been doing our noisy offering for the Youth Gathering we've raised over \$6,000 with just the coins that we have lying around our houses!

But I get it, Megan and I are still working towards hitting that 10% benchmark, and when we get there, we'll work on increasing beyond it. If the chaos of this year has shown us anything, it's that we can never know what will happen next. But, we've never really known that anyway, so is it so different? What I do know, and what I have seen time and time again throughout this past year, is that you, the saints of God at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, will continue to show me the love of Christ. So, let us finish with the words from St. Paul on the ultimate gift from God:

*“5Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as
something to be exploited, 7but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born
in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8he humbled himself and became
obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. 9Therefore God also highly
exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name
of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and
every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
Amen.*