

Sermon 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost Stewardship month -- Tithing October 4, 2009

Genesis 12:1-9; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Matthew 25:14-30

Years ago, a young man knelt with his pastor and prayed as he committed to God his tithe. His first week's pay was 10 dollars and the tithe was 1 dollar. As he grew older he became more prosperous and his tithe was 7 dollars a week, then 10 dollars. He moved to another city and soon his tithe was 100 dollars a week, then 200, then 500. One day the younger man sent his old friend a wire, "Please come see me."

The pastor arrived at the man's house. They had a good time talking over old times. Finally the man came to his point. "You remember that promise I made years ago to tithe. How can I get released?" "Why would you want to get released," asked the pastor? "It's like this," replied the man, "When I made the promise I only had to give 1 dollar, but now it is 500 dollars. I can't afford to give away money like that." The old pastor looked at his friend. "I am afraid **we cannot get released from the promise**, but there is something we can do. We can kneel and ask God to shrink your income so you can afford to give 1 dollar."

Two weeks ago I went to a stewardship seminar lead by Pastor Michael Bennethum the associate of the bishop. The seminar was very inspiring and gave me a lot of hope. The stewardship concept of our Synod is based on a Bible verse from Genesis 12: "Blessed to be a blessing." Sounds familiar?

As Pastor Bennethum talked about stewardship he explained that there is one very common misconception. Often time when we hear about stewardship we think about fundraising. We think about pastor talking about money and about giving to the church. And yet that's not what the stewardship is about.

Stewardship is a practice of faithful living. Just think about it, all of us have been blessed with plenty. Whether it's our gifts and talents, our families and friends, our jobs or material possessions. As Christians we believe that all these things come from God. In fact we believe that they all belong to God. And God blessed us with the opportunity to be able to use all these things and to enjoy them. But at the same time God gave us the responsibility to take care of them and to share them with those who are in need.

For example when you look at your garden, do you think of it like: This is my garden, I'm making these plants grow, and I'm producing fruits? Well you might think that the garden is yours but truly you're just taking care of it. You're planting and watering but it is God who blesses you with growth and the fruits. Truly the garden belongs to God.

Or have you ever looked at your car and thought to yourself, this car belongs to God, I'm just using for whatever God calls me to use it for? And the same things can be applied to our house, our spouse and children. Have you ever looked at your family and thought to yourself, they belong to God and I'm here to take care of them?

As I said stewardship is a practice of faithful living. It's about change of mind and heart. It's about change of our whole lifestyle. It's about realizing that we've been given an incredible privilege to take care of God's creation and his gifts. And it's about realizing that we're called to share these gifts with people around us. For generosity is part of what it means to be a Christian. What we do with what we have is one of the most real and visible expressions of our faith.

And yet we struggle with it on an everyday basis. For we live in the material world and the pressure around us is great. And the result of this pressure is worry. This is what we need, this is what we want, and if we tithe what if we won't have enough... (pause) Fear is the number one enemy of any kind of stewardship. That's why the true stewardship isn't about fundraising but about faith-raising. For it's about putting our trust in God. In God who comes to us and says: "Fear not." To God who says: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for I'll take care of you."

Now the wrap this thing up I need to say, that to start tithing out of the blue might put you into a financial shock. And that's not what God wants for us. And while God does love a cheerful giver, he wants us to be responsible stewards. And so maybe you're thinking, "it is time for me to start a journey toward a tithe." One way to do it is to go little by little. Today you might be able to increase your giving by 1% and so on. As I said the goal of our stewardship campaign isn't talking about money but rather about living out our faith in generosity towards others.

In 2 Corinthians we read: We give "as God has prospered us". It is a wonderful way to live. It is a wonderful way to see things around us. Growing in giving as God has prospered us is the way of faith. It is simpler than it seems. God has blessed our lives and blessed them richly, what will our response be?

Amen