

Month of Stewardship and Dedication October 2017  
Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Grahamstown  
Week 2: 8 October 2017  
Generosity Giving. Sub-Dea Mzinzi Dyantyi

In the name of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There are many things I ENJOY in life — things that are FUN for me — things I look forward to doing. In the summer I enjoy taking a drive with my family to Kenton-on-Sea following a double shift that I have preached in the morning services here in the Cathedral! In the winter, I enjoy and always wait in anticipation for our Festival Eucharist service and the Amazing days of arts and talent showcased in our lovely city.

I could go on and on — and maybe by now you too are thinking of things that give you pleasure — things you do when you want to have a good time. Well, this morning I want to see if I can add another item to your “Things I enjoy list.” As you can see from our order of service sheets there’s a title which reads “Stewardship and dedication month” in particular I’m referring to the practice of GIVING our money to God, or Learning to give “Generously and cheerfully”.

Now to some of us, to enjoy GIVING may sound like a contradiction in terms. It’s like the story I once heard about a boy who was going out of the door and his mom said, “Be good dear and have fun!” and he replied, “Well make up your mind mother!” To him BEING GOOD and HAVING FUN were incompatible. And that is the way some react to the concept of ENJOYING GIVING. The two words just don’t seem to go together!

In fact, many of us definitely DON’T enjoy giving...and because of that we’d rather not hear about it from the pulpit. I mean sitting still for a half hour in an uncomfortable chair listening to a sermon is bad enough...but when the subject is giving money to the church....well, that’s about as much fun as a tooth ache! In my study to prepare for this morning I came across a sermon on stewardship which was titled, “The Most Despised Doctrine in the Bible.” The writer pointed out those other doctrines may irritate us and convict us but no other Biblical teaching causes as much displeasure and resentment as does the doctrine of stewardship.

Now, why does talking about GIVING in the church make many of us feel so uncomfortable? Why is it such an unpopular subject to deal with here in God’s house?

Well one reason is because the doctrine of stewardship has been so abused .All of us are very familiar with TV evangelists and Christian radio show hosts that spend so much of their time asking for our money. Many of us have had experiences like this and so in our minds talking about giving money seem like a tarnished subject that godly preachers should avoid. But you know...if we were honest with ourselves...we would say that another reason that we don’t enjoy this subject is because...

We love our money too much....We are very fond of our funds....very attached to them....and so the ACT of giving itself is a very PAINFUL experience! We go into a state of deep SHOCK and DEPRESSION when we part with our money. We’re like the man someone once wrote about.

Well, if giving is such an uncomfortable, unpopular subject....why should we deal with it from the pulpit in the first place? Well....one reason is because...

1. The subject of GIVING has such a central place in the teachings of the Bible.

In God's written word there are a multiple references to GIVING or STEWARDSHIP. Reading some of these passages shows us that Jesus had more to say about stewardship and money than any other subject including heaven, hell, salvation, and His 2nd coming! But many of us don't know this and so we don't think of giving as a spiritual discipline. One lay person whose church was in the midst of a stewardship campaign, said to his priest: "Rev. Don't you wish you could skip preaching on stewardship and just keep on dealing with SPIRITUAL matters?" Well Stewardship- which includes the Giving of our money to God- is a Spiritual matter. The Apostle Paul thought of it this way. He didn't consider Giving as Unspiritual and separate from so called Spiritual matters, as some of us might have heard last Sunday when the Rev. Claire spoke to us about the Spirituality of giving.

2. ....when we give our money to our church we experience the blessing of God.

In our following text which we will hear about next week Paul reminded us that, "Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." In other words, when we give financially to God we experience God's supernatural intervention in our affairs. He will respond to our giving by giving back to us....blessing our lives in countless ways, including meeting our financial needs.

3. A third reason to deal with this subject is because we-as a local body of Christ-experience spiritual growth and unity when we give.

The context of this morning's second scripture reading is Paul's attempt to raise money for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were literally STARVING to death. These early Christians were in desperate shape due to drought and persecution and Paul was raising money to help them. But I think he had a larger agenda in mind than JUST raising money for the Christians in Jerusalem.

You see he had started these churches in the Gentile world. So, he had an investment in them. He wanted the faith of these new Christians to grow and he knew that if they got involved in this offering for these needy people, this is exactly what would happen. I think Paul thought,

"... if I can get these new Christians to give to this needy group of Christians they will grow in Christ because: they will put others needs before their own...and...in giving sacrificially they will have to trust God and so they will learn to rely on His strength."

But I also think Paul was thinking about how the Jewish Christians were a little nervous about the Gentile Christians...and the Gentile Christians were a little nervous and suspicious about the Jewish Christians. And he felt that if he took this offering from the Gentiles and gave it to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, it might help to break down some of the barriers, and create a unity in the church. And this ought to say something to you and me.

There is so much more involved in subscribing a church budget than simply paying the bills. Because giving IS something that helps us grow spiritually....and giving together builds our fellowship! In fact, a church budget is a team project from the beginning....we put it together as a team-. Through two or three business meetings together, we look at the budget and the plans it involves together...we pray about it and we vote on it....together! And then all year we all sacrificially give together to meet it...we pool our financial resources to achieve a common goal...and it feels GREAT when we succeed-as we have the past year and this gives joy to our heavenly father.

When God sees us giving as He has taught us to give...without any sense of reluctance, it brings Him joy because our ACT OF GIVING represents willful obedience and gives proof of our spiritual growth-but most importantly it convinces Him that we do love for Him! In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands." So there are several important reasons to deal with this subject from the pulpit...but what about the title of today's message? I mean, can GIVING actually bring us PLEASURE?

Can it be FUN to give? Well, it actually CAN-as long as we remember some important principles of giving...and the first is this....

1. ....to enjoy giving we must do so SACRIFICIALLY.

To get any pleasure from giving we must give so much that we have to trust God to do so. Paul said that the sacrificial giving of the Christians in the churches of Macedonia resulted in their great joy. Remember his words in verse 2 of our text? "Out of the most severe trial....their extreme poverty...their overflowing joy...welled up in rich generosity." In fact, they had learned this lesson so well....that sacrificial giving is fun...that verse four says, "they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints." These impoverished believers had discovered that it IS fun to give sacrificially because when we do so, we link ourselves up with God's supply line. When we give to meet the needs of others, He lovingly provides for our needs and that's fun!

A very wealthy man once stood before his congregation to challenge the people to tithe. He shared his testimony saying,

"I have not always been a rich man. In fact there was a time when I was very poor. A number of years ago, I attended a church service and heard the preacher speak about trusting God with all that you have. I had only R50 to my name and it was in my pocket. That morning, I decided to take that preacher at his word and I put that R50 in the offering plate, and walked away from that church putting all my trust in God."

He concluded by saying,

"If I were to put all of my money in the collection plate today, it would be over a million rands"

With those dramatic words he sat down. An elderly lady in the church was sitting behind him and when he sat down, she leaned forward and whispered in his ear loud enough for everyone to hear, "I dare you to do it again!"

Well, in essence that is what God says to us in Malachi 3, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse....Trust ME...test Me in this and see if I will not open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out on you a blessing until it overflows." In other words... "Try this...bring ALL the tithes into My house.....give to Me so much that you have to trust Me to do so and see if it is not fun!" When we offer to God that which costs us nothing, we miss out on a great deal of JOY. And then...another principle to remember we must remember if we want to enjoy giving is that...

2. ...when we give our money we are actually turning something that is temporary into something that is eternal.

Money is only paper...it is a temporary thing...but — when we give it to God's kingdom it becomes much more than that as it is turned into things that last forever. As I alluded to earlier, a common complaint when people hear that the priest is going to preach on stewardship is, "Why doesn't the preacher preach the gospel and not preach on money?" I could think of a couple of answers to that statement but the bottom line is this: there is no such thing as preaching the gospel without preaching money.

Money and the spread of the gospel are closely linked. One reason we have not done more in the spreading of the gospel around the world is that we have not had more money with which to do it. Churches cost money....ministries are expensive....proclaiming the eternal truth of the Gospel requires financial resources.

You see when we give money to the church those pieces of paper that we put in the offering plate are used to provide: resources, utilities and stipends so that this can be a place where we teach people the

ETERNAL truth of the love of God. Money makes this TEMPORARY place possible. But here in this temporary place people become Christians....ETERNAL destinies are determined here. Giving money is a way of making temporary things eternal.

3. Another principle to remember in learning to enjoy giving is the importance of getting our inner motivation to give right.

Jesus taught us that it is wrong to do RIGHT things for the WRONG reasons. Remember what He had to say about people who prayed just to be seen praying or people who fast and then made themselves look awful so everybody would notice that they're fasting or people who went into the Temple to make their offering and they sort of SPUN their money so that it would make a lot of noise and people would notice them giving like in our Gospel reading for today? Giving is the right thing to do but it is wrong to do it just to be seen.

Giving like this takes all the fun out of giving. There are a lot of people who don't enjoy giving because they give for they do it for the wrong reasons. a. SOME GIVE OUT OF DUTY. b. OTHERS GIVE BECAUSE THEY'RE AFRAID NOT TO. They're afraid of what God would do to them if they didn't give!

c. ANOTHER FALSE OR IMPROPER MOTIVE FOR GIVING IS GREED. Some preachers peddle the idea that if you give, God will make you financially rich. I heard one say, "If you want to be a millionaire, give God R100,000 — He can figure out what that is a tithe of." That sort of stuff is like making God some sort of big heavenly slot machine that's been fixed. No — to get any pleasure out of giving we have to have the right motives! Which leads me to my last point.

4. To enjoy giving, we must put it in the context of our love for Christ and our commitment to Him.

This must be our motivation. Did you notice what Paul said about the Macedonians in verse 5 of chapter 8? . He said, "First they gave of THEMSELVES." And you know, that's what God really wants! He's more interested in my HEART and my MIND and our WILL than He is in our bank account. You see, there's a sense in which until we have surrendered ourselves to GOD without any reservation, every request to give creates a spiritual crisis. There are lot of Christians who live and give like that. Every time they're called on to give or do anything, it creates another crisis. Well to get rid of all that we must SURRENDER OURSELVES TO GOD! Out of our love for Jesus, we must turn our whole life and every part of it — over to HIM....and in the giving of ourselves, everything else, including giving our money to His church, becomes nothing but an implementing of what we've already done! Now, on the surface LOVE seems like such a weak motivation compared to LAW or DUTY or FEAR. But only the gifts given out of LOVE enrich the giver.

So, it IS possible to actually enjoy giving....but to do so: we must give sacrificially; we must remember that giving to God is actually turning a temporary thing into something eternal, and we must get our motivations to give right....we must give out of our love for God.

You know in about twenty minutes from now our sides people will come forward and pass plates around this church and we put our monetary gifts in them and we call that time "THE OFFERING." But I think it would be more accurate to call that time "AN offering" because it is not the only time we give to God in worship. In fact, right now....at the end of this service is another time of giving. Because it is in these moments that we give God our lives. (OMIT AT 07h30)

So my brothers and Sisters this morning, is God calling you to participate publicly in this "OFFERING?" Is He knocking on your heart's door.....asking you to invite Him in....if so, then I urge you to let Him in....today make your public profession of faith in Jesus. Give your life to Him today. He could be asking others of you to give yourselves to the ministry of this church...by moving their membership to this local body. Amen!