

Saint John's Lutheran Church

Stuttgart, Arkansas



March, 2018

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the Firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. **Proverbs 3:9-10**

One of my many favorite stories involves the Pastor on an airplane whose engines all go out. As the plain is plummeting to the ground another passenger (in a serious state of panic) notices him and yells, "You're a minister! Do something spiritual!" So he took up an offering.

I don't often talk about money; but as we are in the season of Lent I think I will. It is very fitting and proper that I do because almsgiving is one of the spiritual disciplines. This means that the giving of our alms, offerings, tithe, or whatever we might like to call it, is a matter NOT OF THE POCKET-BOOK, but OF THE HEART!

There's an old business adage that goes like this: "In order to make money you first have to spend money." Anyone who's ever been involved in the operation of a business knows the truth of this statement.

While it has nothing whatsoever to do with running a business, Proverbs 3:9-10 has a similar ring to it: By honoring the Lord with the Firstfruits of what He has given you, your barns will be filled to overflowing.

There are a lot of people that view the Church as a business; it is not! There are many more who consider it to be like a country club, with dues to be paid; it is not! Others look at attending church like going to a movie or out to dinner, dropping some obligatory change in order to pay for services rendered. This, too, is wrong.

Regardless of which of these wrong views a person may hold, all of them speak to a major problem in our faith-

lives: **we do not give to the Lord the Firstfruits of our lives; we give Him only our spare change—if even that.**

There are a host of excuses we all too readily and easily voice in order to justify our lack of giving. The best of which is the simple, "we can't afford to give any more." How do you know? Have you tried? Have you tried to actually place the Lord and His Church as the top priority in life? It doesn't really matter what excuses follow this one, they all can be answered in pretty much the same way.

Our hearts, our time and our money will flow and go in the direction of those things we consider to be most important. While it's not a bad thing to make a buck and to enjoy life and all its wonders, remember who it is that gives life and all these wonders. Remember who it is that gives you health and the skills you have...it is the Lord your God! And while He doesn't require anything from you, He graciously gives you the opportunity to grow in your faith by giving back to Him a portion of that which is already His—to be used to share His Gospel with others that they might also come to know His forgiveness and peace—and to allow you to grow in faith as you trust in Him to enable you to live; even though you have given Him some of your cash!

You see, money, and the accumulation of it, has always been a problem in our lives—we like it a lot! God, however, wants us to understand without a doubt, that it's not money that provides for us! It's Him! And so He provides a means for us to grow in that understanding—through our offerings!

Thus, St. Paul writes: *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

While it's true that we can come up with any number of excuses for not giving more to the Lord, we know that

we should not. When we withhold from Him on any front, it creates a sense of disease in our lives, a lack of peace. This happens because we're trying to fill our hearts with stuff that doesn't last, giving us a case of spiritual indigestion. This because we know that we're holding back on what God wants us to be and be doing.

Finally, no discussion of our spiritual act of giving would be complete without this passage from Micah: *With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (6:6-8).

I love this passage because it shows us the true nature of what our offering is to be: ourselves, our hearts, all that we are in fact; recognizing the graciousness of God's gifts of forgiveness and everlasting life—for which there is no price tag. The entirety of our lives is to be a spiritual offering to the Lord, a testimony to all He has done for us now and in eternity.

As we travel through the season of Lent, I encourage you to consider your giving. Talk it over, pray about it, and adopt a lifestyle that celebrates God's love lived in a Firstfruits manner; you will be blessed! God's peace be with you.

Pastor White

Our Mission:

To Proclaim the Gospel of Redemption through Jesus Christ; & Demonstrate God's Love to One Another, the Community & the World.