

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – June 30th, 2024
TANGIBLE THANKS

Prayer

Father, help us to better understand what it means when we call ourselves stewards of your creation.

AMEN

Background

In preparing for today's message, based on the Epistle reading, it is most certainly true that God has sense of humor. Let me explain – in the voter's meeting later on today, you'll be presented with a budget where the money going out is more than the money coming in. If I wanted to preach as bad sermon, I could read the text about cheerful giving, exhort you to increase your giving to balance the budget and sit down. But you deserve more, so I won't do that.

Context

While the specifics of the text refer to monies given by one congregation to support another, the general principal is one of stewardship of the resources that God has given us, both individually and collectively. Again, the reading refers to financial resources – money, but we are

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called to be good stewards, good managers of all of the resources that God has given us.

It's because we don't own anything that I recite the first stanza of *We Give Thee But Thine Own* when presenting our weekly offerings to God:

*We give Thee but thine own, what e're the gifts may be; All
that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee.*

If you've been around the church long enough, you've most likely heard this summary of stewardship – Time, Talents, and Treasure. It must have come from a preaching resource that held that a three-fold Alliteration was the highest form of preaching; the economist in me believes a much cleaner split would be labor and capital. We can agree that treasure covers the financial resources, but how do you distinguish between time and talents? A good way to think about this is to think about talents as skilled labor, often times based on vocation or hobbies. Examples would include a retired policemen serving as the chair of the security committee, a CPA serving as treasurer, or singing in the choir (at least here at Redeemer). On the other hand, an example of time,

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let's call it unskilled labor, is that same retired policemen serving as an usher, where few, if any, special skills are required.

Economic Systems

The last couple of verses in the reading – verses 13 through 15, are used by some as a proof-text – a passage that provides strong support for a truth-claim – for why Jesus and his disciples were the original communists. They read as follows:

. . . that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

it sounds much like Karl Marx's famous phrase:

From Each according to Ability; To Each according to Needs

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I don't want to detour into why this doesn't work in practice but suffice it to say that our sin nature gets in the way. But this text, with a little different understanding, could be used to say that the early followers of Jesus had created the first mutual benefit insurance company, since those who had excess contributed to those who were in need – not unlike getting an insurance payout for the loss of property or life.

Giving Tainted by Sin

We do indeed give, but our giving can be tainted by sin in several ways – let's look at examples of this in scriptures.

Guilt: This is the one that I began today's sermon with. Scripture is often twisted or taken out of context and used as proof-texts for giving, such as Psalm 32:17:

The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives

The twist lies in taking the negative and saying that is true as well:

Those who don't give aren't righteous.

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This is NOT the proper way to understand scripture, but I does show how the law can be twisted to beat people into action. This can work for a short time but often results in a build-up of resentment.

Quid Pro Quo: A latin phase meaning *This for That*, where we give expecting to get back something of similar value. Preachers of a false wealth and prosperity gospel might say something to the effect of ‘You can’t out-give God;’ the implied message being that the more you give, the more God will bless you (usually financially). We Lutherans might be guilty of this when we donate to our favorite charity so that we can attend a long, often boring, and overpriced chicken dinner. Wisdom literature is often used support for these bad ideas, such as Proverbs 19:17:

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.

The false premise being that the repayment from God will of the same nature as what was given.

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Recognition: Be it a simple plaque or an entire school named after you, giving to create a recognizable legacy is often a motivator for giving. The Pharisee and the tax collector is an excellent example of doing something good primarily to be recognized for (Luke 18:9-14):

[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

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Don't Make Promised You Won't Keep

Recognition can be a fickle thing, When I was at teaching at Concordia, a donor failed to make good on a pledge and the room that bore their name was 'de-named.' God takes and even dimmer view of those who promise one thing but then welch on their promise or lie about it, as seen in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, found at the start of the 5th book of the Acts of the Apostles. It's long, so I won't quote it, but you can look it up after service ends.

Examples of Good Giving Practices

Ok, so how should we then give? First and foremost, our giving should be an offering of thanksgiving. As Luther explains in his explanation of first article of the Creed:

. . . He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. . . . All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or

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*worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to **thank and praise**, serve, and obey Him.*

What we give back to God is indeed tangible thanks of what He has given to us. And our thanks are not only for His meeting our temporal needs, as noted above, but even more so by the spiritual gifts won for us by Christ's life, death, and resurrection, namely the restoration of the relationship that was broken by the fall, our adoption into His family, the forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life.

Secondly, from Matthew 6:3, we see the principal of giving anonymously:

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing

Finally, from today's text, verse 7, we see the principal of giving generously:

But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

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Why Tangible Giving?

I want to close by going back and focusing on the tangible aspect of God's gift to us. Why? Because God likes stuff – He created the world, everything in it, and He declared that it was good (before the fall). He chose to take on our human nature, through the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus really suffered, died, and then rose from the dead. God uses tangible means to give us faith so that we trust His promised. It often begins when you are baptized with water and God's word spoken to you (as will happen this morning to Joey in the second service). God is clear that faith comes by hearing, and I've done my best to be faithful to speak God's Word to absolve you from sin, to read Holy Scripture and encourage you with the Gospel and preach to you both Law and Gospel in this sermon. Be assured that God's Word carries the Holy Spirit, which enlightens, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith to life everlasting. Finally, we eat and drink the very body and blood of our Lord, in, with, and under forms of bread and wine, as to both create and strengthen faith in us and as a tangible reminder of how Jesus took our sins and exchanged them for eternal life with Him.

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Let us now turn to our gracious and giving God, not only to give Him thanks and praise but to intercede on behalf of those around us, whatever their needs may be.

AMEN