

*Stewardship Commitment Sermon Series*

*“Why I Give: Part 2”*

*Deuteronomy 16:13-17; Proverbs 3:9-10; Luke 6:37-38; 2 Corinthians 9:7-11*

*Salem United Methodist Church; November 25, 2018*

*Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling*

Two Sundays ago I asked us to reflect on why we give. Then sheets of paper were handed out with the words, “Why I Give,” written at the top. I invited us to consider why we give and write it down our reasons and if you felt comfortable sharing to place your written response in the offering plate. Many were turned in. Thank you. Today we will celebrate the reasons why we give.

Here’s a story about giving. During the Stewardship Commitment season, the wealthiest member of the congregation was asked to share a portion of his faith story. “I’m a billionaire,” he said, “and I attribute it all to the rich blessings of God in my life. I can still remember the turning point in my faith, like it was yesterday: I had just earned my first dollar and I went to a youth meeting that night. The speaker was a missionary who told about his work. I knew that I only had a dollar bill and had to either give it all to God’s work or nothing at all. So at that moment I decided to give my whole dollar to God. I believe that God blessed that decision, and that is why I am a rich man today.” When he finished and sat down, the chair of the finance committee stood up and said: “Wonderful story! I dare you to do it again!”

At first glance this story illustrates the Proverb, “Honor the Lord with your wealth...and your barns will be full to overflowing.” And Jesus’ teaching on giving, the more we give the more God will give us. Both interpretations would support prosperity theology which subscribes to the idea of the more one gives, the more God will increase one’s material wealth. A real estate agent was having difficulty making a sale. She heard if she gave to God through the church, God would increase her prosperity. She gave to the church for three months. During that time she hadn’t sold one house, so she stopped giving. Prosperity theology turns our relationship with God into a quid pro quo transaction. We give to God in order to gain greater material compensation from God. Prosperity theology supports the idea that more we give financially the richer we will become. Faith then becomes a self-generated spiritual force.

When Jesus said, “Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity,” he was not speaking about giving to increase one’s wealth. For Jesus giving is an act of self-denial. Giving is a means of honoring God for all God has done for us. Remembering what God has done for us is the whole concept of the Feast of Tabernacles which is mentioned in Leviticus. This can also be called, Festival of Booths or *Sukkot* in Hebrew. Jews today still celebrate this Feast which occurs usually in the early fall. Our Jewish neighbors build these tent-like structures in their driveways or backyards. However, the roofs are woven with branches so that one can see the sky. For seven days they eat, read scriptures, pray, and even sleep in these booths. The purpose of this festival is to remind them of the time of wilderness wandering, the time when they had to rely on God for everything: food, water, and security. By looking through the open spaces of the booth’s roofs, they are reminded yet again that we do not control life. God is in control. We can learn from our Jewish siblings. When we let go of the illusion that we control of every aspect of our lives: our health, family, employment, finances, etc., we begin to take the first steps on relying on God. And when we rely on God we will receive peace and security even in the midst of adverse situations. When we recognize that God is in control, then we give out of gratitude for all that God has done, is doing, and will be doing for us. We give not so much out of obligation, but out of gratefulness. And we give with joy from our hearts. We give the amount that is in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed us.

The Hebrew Bible often talks about giving the tithe; that is the first ten percent of one's income. One tither expressed to me. God gives me hundred percent of what I have. Then asks that I live on ninety percent and give God ten percent. That is generous, but Jesus doesn't talk about the tithe or even giving in proportion to what our blessings are. Jesus speaks to giving away your life, giving away everything. Giving one hundred percent of who we are and what we are. What would it look like if we were to give all that we are and have to God? Teresa of Avila, who lived in Spain during the sixteenth century, wanted to build a convent. She had only a small sum of money and was told that she wouldn't be able to do it. Her response was, "Oh, yes! Teresa, this small sum, and God can." She was speaking from spiritual wisdom and not rational thought. She gave herself and the small sum. She and the money belonged to God. Using the metaphor that Paul used to the church at Corinth, Teresa planted lavishly and God reaped lavishly.

According to a survey done in 2017 by Non-Profit Source, faith based organizations remain the largest recipient of giving. However, 80 percent of the people surveyed gave 2% or less of their income. As your pastor, I will not tell you how much to give. I will ask you talk it over with God. Let God show you why you are to give and what you are to give. That portion may be greater than ten percent of your income. That portion may be ten percent of your income. That portion may be less than ten percent of your income. One person wrote in response to "Why I Give," "I never thought about why [I give]. I only thought about what [I give]." Remember all that you have is a gift from God and was God's before it was yours. Whatever amount God and you agree upon, give with an attitude of gratefulness and joy.

A boy named, Timmy, didn't want to put his money in the offering plate Sunday morning, so his mother decided to use some hurried creative reasoning with him. "You don't want that money, honey," she whispered in his ear. "Quick! Drop it in the plate. It's tainted!" Horrified, the little boy obeyed. After a few seconds he whispered, "But, mommy, why was the money tainted? Was it dirty?" "Oh, no dear," she replied. "It's not really dirty. It just 'taint yours, and it 'taint mine," she replied. "It's God's."

The responses to "Why I Give" reflect the understanding that all we have comes from God: we give because God first gave to us. Hear these responses: "Because God blesses me. I want to give back so others can be blessed also." "I give as a way to thank God for the many blessings bestowed on me and my family through our membership at Salem Church. This church (aka "our church family") has given us love, support, laughter, food, fellowship, counseling, and prayers." "To provide the church with the means to spread the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus who is our example of Love in this world." "I give because God is my life. All that I have I owe to God. The church is where I go to be close to God. The church pulls the believers together in unity. It gives us a home to share and rejoice in God's love together. Church makes me a better person. Support for the church is support to God." "To thank God and to support outreach." "Out of obedience and gratitude." "Because I love the Lord." "I give in response to God's many blessings in my life-the glory of God's creation, my family, my friends, and this church. The joy of living." "Because I know however it is used, it will help someone here, through ASP, or wherever. Salem takes every donation, every act, and multiplies it." "To make sure all get the love of God and happiness to continue to be healthy and wise with all his love." "To ensure our church community continues to be here to help the congregation and the works for the disenfranchised outside our doors." "I give out of love for God and my church family at Salem. I am so blessed." This is why we give. As our congregation plans for 2019, what will you give to not only support our current ministries, but perhaps even increase our ministries so that we grow deeper in our faith and reach further into our community?

**Resources:** *Money Isn't Is Everything* by Herb Miller; "Jokes," [www.stewardshipoflife/jokes](http://www.stewardshipoflife/jokes); "Charitable Giving Statistics," <https://nonprofitssource.com/online-giving-statistics>

