

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA November 2, 2014

## *A Healthy Church – A Proper View of Possessions*

- 1. Know that “it’s all God’s”**
- 2. Be properly motivated**
- 3. Put it into practice**

Hymns: 200 – 477 – 489 – 312 - 487

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

It’s a bit uncanny. And it’s quite coincidental. Here at church we plan our worship services out about four to eight months in advance. Worship of the Lord is the most important activity a church does, and it’s good to plan the big picture of a well-rounded selection of sermon texts and worship hymns. In addition, there are many musicians and leaders to keep informed as we plan service themes.

Last summer, when we were discussing when to use this sermon series we’re following, called “**A Healthy Church**,” it seemed like the weeks following our church and school anniversary would be very fitting. After a look back at the past blessings our Lord has given to us at Holy Trinity, it seemed perfect to look to the future and pray that God would bless us with congregational health as we fulfill the mission he has given us.

Pastor Voss mentioned at the beginning of the service that this week’s theme concerning the health of a church focuses on our attitude toward material possessions. It involves our view of money and earthly things. And it involves the attitude we have as we bring our offerings to support the work of our church and school.

It’s rather uncanny that the theme for this Sunday would fall on a week when our leaders have sent much communication to our

members about our church’s stewardship and the need we have at this time to fund the ministry we have chosen to do here.

But be it what it is. This is the week chosen in this series to talk about our attitudes toward possessions and our offerings we bring, and we will do so in the Scriptures with the prayer that God would bless our study of his Word today!

### **1. Know that “it’s all God’s”**

We will examine a number of principles today that we will never want to forget. Where do we start in our focus on such a big topic? The first principle is the best place to start. It is the underlying principle that gets us moving in the right direction. It comes from Psalm 24:1,2: *“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”* **The first thing we must know today is that it’s all God’s.**

Not one thing that we call our own is truly owned by us. It all belongs to and comes to us from God. Pause for a moment and let that truly sink in... It’s all God’s. If we don’t start and end the conversation with this understanding, we don’t have a prayer of having a healthy attitude about earthly possessions. Everything that we have belongs to God. He created it. He preserves it. And he gives it as he wills. Anything that we have in this life comes from God: Our life, our breath, our health, our wealth, our parents, our children, our friends, our time, our blessings... Everything!

And look at the love of our heavenly Father. He takes the things that he has made and that he possesses and shares them with us! And he has done it generously! He puts the things that we need to live into our hands and gives us our possessions as a trust. He gives you everything; you have to manage them wisely. And he also has given you what you have as a way to show your faith in him.

That’s what we’re talking about when we use the term “Christian stewardship”: Managing the things that God has put into our hands. God has a lot to say in his Word about how we are to manage the things he entrusts to us. But before we will even listen to what God says we need to

understand that he has a right to talk to us about what he has given us to manage. We want to make the same confession of the Old Testament believer Job: *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."*

**Know that it's all God's!**

## **2. Be properly motivated**

Where do we go from there? Recently, one of our WELS pastors shared something that happened to his family. Their minivan had to go to the body shop to repair a door that was crunched in a parking lot. During the repair time their family was given a loaner vehicle. It was a very young, almost new Dodge Grand Caravan. It was nice. It ran well. It was clean. It was spacious. It was modern. It was great! This pastor talked about the time when he had to give it back. He was reluctant! Even though they only had it for a few days and knew all along that it wasn't going to be theirs to keep, he didn't want to give it up.

Do we ever get that way when it comes to the things we have? We know and remind ourselves that everything we have is on loan to us from God, a trust from him. We know that we are not going to take it with us when we die. And yet it becomes a "part of our heart" that we hurt to part with! Material things and money can so easily become a master instead of our servant. When we have them, it's so easy to have our sinful nature's true colors come out that we don't exhibit when it comes to other conversations about our life of faith, feelings of:

- Greed – Wanting more and more.
- Coveting – Wanting what we cannot or should not have.
- Worry – Wringing our hands that we will not have enough.
- Discontent / jealousy – Not finding joy in what God has given us.

Martin Luther noticed this among people of his day 500 years ago. He commented that to him it seemed like a man needed three conversions: One of his heart, so he would love God; one of his mind, so he would think as God

would have him think; and one of his pocket-book. He saw the true colors of people's attitudes in his day as there were many that obviously had a nerve struck when it came to their material possessions and money.

God knows these thoughts. The One who sees all sees into our hearts. Jesus and the other Scriptures have much to say about material possessions and money:

- Jesus said, *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"* (Luke 12:15). He followed that up with his parable of the Rich Fool.
- Both Matthew and Mark record the incident where the eager young man comes to Jesus to claim his discipleship, and Jesus looks at him and tells him to sell all he has and give it away first, and he goes away sad.
- The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"* (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

As we analyze our own congregation and ourselves for spiritual health in this area, I have some fears. I have these fears because we did an anonymous study of our congregation's patterns of giving offerings for the previous fiscal year (July – June, 2013-14). We found out:

- That of our church members who are 23 years old and older (in other words, not taking into account high school or college-aged young people), 31% of our envelope boxes contribute nothing to our congregational ministry here.
- That of our church members who are 23 years old and older (in other words, not taking into account high school or college-aged young people), 49% of

envelope boxes for households contribute \$10/week or less

- That of the same age group in our church, the average monthly offering per envelope box to our church is \$168. (That means if a household is tithing, their monthly income is \$1680.

That causes me to have some fears:

- I fear there are some of our church members who do not give first-fruits
- I fear there are church members who do not use the Old Testament guide of giving the tithe, or 10%, as a baseline for their giving
- Knowing the times that we live in, I have a fear there are people who have an imbalance in their life of stewardship. Some of the seemingly “necessary” things can overshadow the offerings they honor the Lord with in their monthly offerings, things like –
  - Their monthly car payments
  - Hobbies
  - Entertainment
  - Cable TV
  - Internet plan
  - Cell phone plan

Don't get me wrong; those things aren't inherently sinful. However, how do those individual things stack up against the offerings to the Lord for the ministry of our church and school?

- I fear there are many in our church who might have a sensitivity to bringing this up.

Whether this is true or not, God knows. That's why we need to pray to him. We need to pray, “Lord, forgive me for the times when I have loved my possessions more than I have loved you; forgotten you; lasting joy in things. Forgive me for sinful attitudes and selfishness and allowing my life to be driven by what I do or do not have. Forgive me for misplaced priorities. Forgive me for not being the manager you have called me to be.”

But don't stop there. Lift up your head and hear what God says to sinners: “*You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so*

*that you through his poverty might become rich.*” God showed his grace by generous giving. He showed his undeserved love to sinners like us by sending his Son. Jesus Christ became poor. He chose not to make a claim to all that was his – and for our sake! He took our place under God's holy law. He was content in all circumstances. He managed everything in his possession flawlessly. And although perfectly free from sin, guilt, greed, and selfishness, he willingly took on his soul every sin of greed and mismanagement that we ever had and suffered the penalty of those sins. He is your perfect Savior. **Find comfort and joy in knowing that God has made us rich in every way through him who became poor for us!**

And find joy also in the fact that in your present and future life God will give you more chances to be a faithful manager and steward of his blessings. We don't ever have to worry about having enough... ever!

- Romans 8:32 tells us, “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*”
- Jesus preached in his day, “*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?... Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*”

### 3. Put it into practice

That leaves us with one last question today. How do we put this into practice? After God has broken through our selfish attitudes and

forgiven us of them, how do we start? If your stewardship has been out of whack and needs an overhaul, it can be an overwhelming thought.

Let's take a look at what God's Word tells us:

- *"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops" (Proverbs 3:9).* If your offerings to the Lord have degenerated into "leftovers," make the decision to honor him and trust him as you give of your first-fruits.
- *1 Corinthians 16:2 – "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."* Here we see a few principles of giving offerings mentioned:
  - Planned giving – May God bless the spontaneous gift also, but Scripture encourages us to think ahead and give a gift that we have planned in our budget.
  - Priority – Just like we make it a priority to worship the Lord on the first day of the week, our offerings to him are a priority as well.
  - Proportional – it would not be fair to expect the same offerings from all individuals in a congregation, for God has blessed us differently. This is why percentage giving makes much sense.
- *2 Corinthians 9:11 – "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion."* God encourages generous giving, even testing him! (Malachi 2)
- *2 Corinthians 8:9 – "God loves a cheerful giver."*

As we close our look at the Christian's right view of possessions, I'd venture to say that this is perhaps the most difficult message to hear in this series. And it comes at a time when we need to be encouraged in the grace of giving.

Therefore, may God guide. May he guide us to a repentant heart for the times we have let our focus and our priorities in this world get out of whack. And may he graciously forgive us and lead us to a proper practice of stewardship with the treasures he has given us! Amen.