

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA February 13, 2011

Exodus 35:4-9, 20-29

Let He Who is Willing

1. *Our View of Valentine's Day*
2. *Our View of Stewardship Sunday*
3. *The Lord Has a Request*

Hymns: 354 – 486 – 489 – 745

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Exodus 35:4-9, 20-29

Moses said to the whole Israelite community, "This is what the LORD has commanded: From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD. Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or hides of sea cows brought them. Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the LORD, and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair. The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and

for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.

Valentine's Day—at its best, it is a day that should fill our hearts with a great feeling. It is a day when we are reminded of the great blessings of love. We get to reflect on how we are loved and we get to make our love known. There needs to be no limit to the ways that we show that love. The more extravagant you go, the more you are thought of. It is a day where love truly knows no bounds. But how do you really feel about this day? Do you see it as a money sucker? Do you wish it would stop coming around every year? Do you feel a certain amount of pressure to live up to expectations? You might feel a sense of compulsion, thinking that there might be repercussions if you don't deliver.

Have I summed up your feelings about Valentine's Day, the Hallmark holiday, made up as many think so that card-makers, candy companies and florists can make a little extra cash? Have I summed up your feelings about the old stewardship Sunday, a day that provides some with the ammo to say that all the church cares about is money? As I thought about them, I saw a whole bunch of similarities. As we look at it, a Sunday in which we focus on our treasures can be a wonderful day. It is a day that can fill our hearts with a great feeling. We are reminded of the great blessings of love. We get to reflect on how we are loved by God and we get to make our love for God known in a tangible way....And yet, so often for so many, there is this wish that it would just go away. We hear lessons focused on giving and we tense up. Our ears might be a little quicker to tune out.

But the simple truth of the matter is that our Savior did not shy away from talking about money and neither can we. Why is it important, you might ask, "If the earth is the Lord's and everything in it?" Does God need our offerings? Does he have homes to pay off, kids to put through school, mouths to feed on a nightly basis? Can't he accomplish his work without our help? Of course he can! But he has given us the opportunity to help and what a wonderful opportunity it is. And so he comes to us, just as he came to the Israelites long ago and he comes with a request, "Out of everything that I have given to you, give me back a portion to show your love and accomplish my work."

In Israel's case, this offering that God wanted Moses to collect was to be for a tabernacle, a traveling temple for the Lord to call his home as the Israelites journeyed on their exodus. It was certainly a reasonable request. The God who called the Israelites out of Egypt had just put his covenant into writing on Mt. Sinai. Many of those decrees written on the stone tablets governed the Israelites worship life and there needed to be a place of worship for them to be carried out. So, the Israelites had a goal in front of them. God told them exactly how he wanted this tabernacle to be built. How do you think they responded?

Now before we look to the text, let's try to guess, based on what we know about the Israelites. When I mention the children of Israel, what is your first thought? I think of Paul's description of the nation of Israel in Romans, where he speaks of them having every advantage because God chose them to be the line through which the Savior would come. As part of God's plan, they had to be a sustained nation, from the time of Abraham to the birth of Jesus. They were given all the promises of a Savior directly. They often saw the miraculous benefits of God's providential hand. And yet, with every advantage, what we most often see and hear in the Bible is the people of Israel messing up as followers of God.

Most notably, we know the story of the Exodus. The people of Israel were slaves in a foreign land, under Pharaoh of Egypt. They slaved and they suffered and they complained until God, according to his plan and his timing, decided to deliver them in a miraculous way. Their exodus out of Egypt is well-documented. It was an arduous journey to their homeland. Any trip involving millions of people would be. But this trip was harder because it was through a desert and nobody on the journey really knew where they were going. And as the journey continued for many years, the people grew increasingly tired, thirsty, hungry and frustrated. And so they did what tired, thirsty, hungry, frustrated people do. They complained. And throughout the journey God came with an answer to whatever problem they had. Then something else happened, and they complained some more. And God would again come to the Israelites aid. Isn't that what the book of Exodus seems to be, a broken record of the grumblings of the people of Israel and God's response?

And so, you would guess that when God came to the people asking them for something, the people might balk and complain and tell God that they had enough

things to worry about without this added pressure of trying to pay for a tabernacle.

However in chapter 35 of the book of Exodus, we see a different side of the people of Israel. This side of the Israelites comes out only a few short chapters after Moses had come down off of Mt. Sinai with the 10 Commandments and the rest of the covenant that God had made for his people. He came down eager to share what God had promised to him and all of Israel. He didn't have a chance to do so. He had found the people in chaos with a golden calf at the center of the mess. Now, fast forward just a bit and we see a very different people of Israel. Listen to the Israelites' response to God's plea, keeping in mind their normal behavior, their recent past and their tired, frustrated attitude as they wandered through the desert:

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord. Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or hides of sea cows brought them. Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the Lord, and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair. The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do."

Is that what you were expecting? In addition to the vast amounts of varying treasures that Moses lists there, the thing that jumps out to me is the attitude with which the Israelites collected and offered those treasures. The same people who had previously brought their gold and silver to Aaron so that he could melt it into a false god were now willingly and gladly bringing their gifts to the Lord so that he could have a temple. That is the wonder of this story. How was it possible? What could account for such a change? It

didn't happen because Moses had chastised them for their disobedience and commanded them to do this or else. It didn't happen because he got up in front and made an urgent plea. They were willing because their hearts were moved. They were moved by the only thing that can resuscitate hearts dead in sin. They were made alive by the grace of God. It is crazy to think that such a change could take place from that chaos of the golden calf to what we just heard, but that is what the Gospel does. God's good news of a Savior miraculously changes peoples' hearts and it changes peoples' lives. God had caught them in the midst of wild idol worship, and they were still alive. God was still treating them as his people in spite of all that they had done. What mercy! What love! What blessing they had! And they recognized that love as they sat in the middle of the desert and they responded to God's request. And every single one of us knows that same tremendous love of God. We spend our lives continually chasing after our sinful desires. We give into all kinds of temptations that are around us every single day. And what happens? God repeatedly showers his love upon us in so many ways. He soothes our guilty hearts with the comfort that forgiveness has been won for us and given to us. He brings encouragement in just the right way when we are burdened in life. He has put us in a spot where we get to gather with hundreds of other Christians who treasure the pure Word of God. He has given us faithful teachers who help the children of our congregation grow in mind and spirit. In all those ways, and countless more, he pours out his love; and those are just the spiritual blessings that the Lord has showered upon each of us. None of us would have to rack our brains to come up with a laundry list of physical blessings that he also gives. We have it so good! And in view of all of that, when the Lord comes to us with the same request with which he came to the Israelites, how do we respond? How do we answer when the Lord comes to each one of us personally and says, "I would like you to help me accomplish my work. What are you willing to give to spread the Gospel?" In view of all of the blessings that we have, both spiritual and physical, you would have to guess that all of us who have been showered with God's blessings would be more than willing to answer that call. You would think that just like the Israelites, our hearts would be moved....but what is the reality?

Would an account of the people of Holy Trinity read like this section from Exodus? **Then the whole Holy Trinity congregation withdrew from Pastor's presence, and everyone who was willing and whose**

heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the church and the school, and for all its ministry. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought their offerings of all kinds." Or are you glad that your life of faith is not recorded with the same detail as those of the children of Israel?

That is a question that I can't answer for you. I can only preach of God's grace and the eternal gifts that I know are yours. I can only remind you week after week to look at your life and reflect on all the blessings that God has given you. I can only pray that as you leave here each Sunday, your heart will be moved to serve God in your week ahead. I can only encourage you to answer the Lord's request. So, may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.