

## ***What Are You Giving?***

Rev. Michael J. Mattil

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

One Sunday morning, the pastor announced to his congregation: "I have here in my hands three sermons...a \$1000 sermon that lasts 10 minutes, a \$500 sermon that lasts 20 minutes, and a \$100 sermon that lasts a full hour. Now, we'll take the collection and see which one I'll deliver."

To tell you the truth, I'm not sure I have a thousand dollar sermon...of any length. If I did, I'd might have the Senate investigating me like they are those televangelists, asking about how they are using the millions of dollars in contributions they receive. People like that give Christians a bad reputation. They are the most visible representatives of Christianity to the world, and probably the LEAST representative of Christianity. So often the so-called televangelists have little or nothing to do with what it really means to be Christian. They are not preaching Christ crucified as the only hope for a world that is lost in sin. They don't condemn sin and proclaim forgiveness for Jesus' sake, and then urge people to live a new life in response to that forgiveness. They are not emphasizing Jesus. They are preaching prosperity and happiness and feeling good while you are here on earth. It is because of frauds and charlatans who bilk people out of their money in the name of Jesus that it is often difficult to talk to people about financial stewardship. The devil loves to use negative examples to cloud the message of God's Word.

Today is the day we consecrate the pledges that you have turned in or will turn in during the offering today. That is a part of being a good steward of what God has entrusted to your care. The passage I read at the beginning of this message was written in the context of a financial gift. But I want to remind you today that your finances are just one part of being a good steward. And I think this passage from 2 Corinthians has a much broader application in our lives as disciples of Jesus. A summary what it means to be a Christian Steward that has been used in our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod for many years now is still very timely for us today.

***“Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes.”***

Let that sink in. It is talking about putting your faith into action. Not just whatever you drop in the plate, but living for Jesus 24-7. Using your being for God's purposes. That can be expressed in so many ways

- It might be on a Mission Trip to help rebuild homes in **Mississippi** or checking in on a neighbor.
- It could be putting a check in the **collection plate** or giving to help the victims of fire in California.
- It could be helping out with our **Midweek program** for children or visiting a nursing home and spending a little time with some lonely people.

... *managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes*. What are you giving? This congregation exists only in part to serve the needs of its members. It also exists to give its members opportunities to serve.

At this time of year, we see a lot of **geese flying** south for the winter. You recognize those V formations in the sky and sometimes hear the honking overhead. Evidently scientists has studied this and discovered that as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following it. By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds over 70% greater flying range than if each bird were to fly alone. Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it feels the additional drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the other birds.

Something else we observe from the geese is that when the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back in the wing and another bird flies point. It pays to take turns doing hard jobs. And the honking from behind seems to be an encouragement for those up front to keep up their speed.

Are these things played out in the church? Don't we see the truth of these lessons? Jobs are easier when we work together to accomplish them rather than trying to do it on our own. It makes sense to take turns doing difficult tasks to keep from burning out the same people who always end up doing everything.

A word of encouragement for those who are taking the lead and doing the work would be appreciated and helpful rather than complaining and questioning.

In the V formation, all the geese give something. All contribute to the effort, and by working together they are able to go far. How will you give?

I came across a story of a **Vicar**, which is a student pastor, kind of like an intern. A Vicar is assigned to work with a congregation during his third year of Seminary training before returning to school for a fourth and final year. This particular Vicar was about to leave his congregation and go back to the seminary, and he was also preparing to be married. The members of that congregation planned a combination farewell and wedding shower. They wanted to say goodbye and give wedding gifts all in one. They planned the event for a Sunday afternoon in the church fellowship hall. One lady decided that she was too busy to attend, but wanted to go over in advance and drop off her gift. She did that, but as she was driving out of the parking lot, she thought, “What if everyone dropped off their gifts and no one stayed for the farewell? I’m sure that being present at his party would mean much more than all the gifts!” I wonder if God feels that way when we bring Him our gifts, but not ourselves.

**1 John 3:18** *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

**1 Timothy 6:17-19** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

That last passage, while encouraging everyone to do good deeds and share generously, puts it all into context when it says that all people should “**put their hope in God.**” Giving to God is not seen as a chore or a burden when you have put your hope in Him. With your hope in Him, you are reminded that He has given you everything you have. More than that, you remember that He has provided a way for you to be certain that all your guilt, all your shame, all your sin has been taken away. Jesus died for you for just that reason. His death in your place assures you of complete forgiveness. His resurrection is your guarantee of life everlasting. You put your hope in God and are convinced that He has done all this for you. And you are also reminded that

**Romans 8:32** *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?*

God has given you all things. What are you giving?