

February 5, 2024

Dear co-workers in the kingdom,

There is perhaps no single thing we can do to emulate God more than the simple act of giving. I don't mean just money, of course. The significance of a financial contribution varies a great deal depending upon the circumstance. No, financial giving is only one of the *many* ways--and not always the most meaningful way--that we are able to give. Yet giving of any kind is the simplest and most direct imitation of God.

Think about it: What does God do for us? He gives! Every day. He has given us life. He gives health and family. He gives talents and friendships and the joy of success, and he gives food and laughter and the comfort of a family. Above all, He gave Himself for us. He atoned for our sin so that he might--are you ready for it--GIVE us everlasting life!

Let's face it, God is a giver, and never once has His gift been dependent on what we do, either in advance or in response. God gives freely and generously. And that is how He teaches *us* to give. We know from experience that it is satisfying to meet a need for another person, whether a kind word, a helping hand, or a financial boost.

The problem is that giving exacts a toll. Consider the parents of a brand new baby. There is nothing in life as exciting as becoming a parent, and nothing parents would not do for their child. Yet several months in, those opportunities to care for the child in the middle of the night can be somewhat less joyful. It is not that they *love* the child any less. There is just a fatigue that comes when we give meaningfully over time.

That fatigue can be felt in the care (and the cost) of raising children. It can be felt in the relentless burdens of caring for an invalid, and it can be felt in the ongoing support of ministry that seems to continue without relief. It is not giving at any one time that is difficult, but the fatigue that comes from an ongoing need.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the path to refreshment is to withdraw from the connections through which we have opportunities to give. Quite the contrary, God has always told us to give in faith that He will not only provide what we need, but also that our giving will be a means by which God Himself blesses us.

Consider the widow of Zarepheth. She had no money and only food for one meal, but she shared with the Man of God and was not only provided for but blessed. Consider the widow who in faith put the last of her money--the smallest coin--into the offering at the temple. She was praised by the Lord as the greatest of givers. Consider the Samaritan who gave of himself and

helped the stranger who was in need at the side of the road, or the apostle Philip, who sat in the chariot of a rich and powerful man and taught him the Word of

God. They did not give large amounts of money.* But they DID give of themselves, whether by their wallet or their hands or their words. They gave of themselves, and God Himself has held them up as examples for us.

Remember that the key word of stewardship is “faith.” God has placed opportunities before you to give in the coming year, and we want to encourage you to face those opportunities with a living faith. Stewardship is not something we do on Sundays. It is seen in the things we do and in the way we act. And we have *every right* to act like people who are confident that the Lord is at work in us. We have *every right* to call upon God for the resources to help others, and every *confidence* that He will not fail to answer.

Enclosed is your pledge card for the coming year at St. John’s. I hope it has been clear that your participation in the ministry at St. John’s is only a part of what God is doing in your life. Any support you choose to give in the coming year will contribute to what we hope to do for the kingdom, but it is by no means to be the sole focus of your giving. Please consider prayerfully the examples of giving cited above and consider how God has gifted you to give of yourself.

If you wish to offer a pledge at St. John’s, please fill out the enclosed card. They will be received in worship on February 11. If you are unable to attend on that Sunday, please feel free to drop it off in the church office any time.

Above all, whatever you give and however you serve, be joyful! What we may see as hard times or personal trial is all a part of God’s great plan, and we can safely TRUST that He will make from us, and from our contributions, a great work for His kingdom.

Your servant in Christ,

-Pastor Kempin

* 1 Kings 17; Luke 21:1-4; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 8:26-40