



October 17, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! We have once again arrived at that time of year where we're handing out pledge cards and asking you to prayerfully consider the amount of money that you will pledge to Church of the Messiah for the year 2022. With this in mind, I wanted to take a few moments, as your pastor, to say a few words about giving from a Biblical perspective. It's my hope that in taking the time to read this over, you will let these words become the basis for both your prayers and your pledge. As always, if you have any questions about what I say or would like some guidance in your giving, I am certainly available to you. Just call me at the office or email me. I would be happy to talk with you.

Perhaps the first, and most important, question to be asked when it comes to giving is this: ***Why do we give?*** The short answer is that we give because we have been given to. In Jesus Christ, God has given us everything there is to be had that is of true and lasting importance. In Christ, we have received forgiveness, new and eternal life, reconciliation with God, the promise of resurrection, a place in God's Kingdom, and His Holy Spirit, who is even now dwelling in each one of us baptized believers. God has not withheld one good thing from us, but He has given it to us unconditionally, lovingly, freely, and abundantly. To put it succinctly, God is a giver -- a free, joyful, and loving giver. For that reason, He commands and instructs us to be givers as well. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "God loves a cheerful giver." He calls us to be the kind of people who, upon receiving joyfully from His hand, give joyfully in return. This is very important for us to remember: Everything, absolutely everything, that we have comes from God. All of it is sheer gift from the hand of our loving Father. And so, He commands us throughout the Scriptures to take some of what He has given to us and to give it back to Him, in gratitude and thanksgiving, as an act of faith or trust.

This leads us then to the second question that's before us: ***Who is giving for?*** I just said a moment ago that we are to take from what God has given to us and to give it back to Him. While this is true, it can also be a bit misleading. The fact of the matter is that God is the Lord of heaven and earth and, as such, is truly in need of nothing from us. Everything is in His hands and at His disposal. But there are some people in our day-to-day lives who are truly in need of our giving, and they are our neighbors. God has placed people all around us whom He calls us to help by our acts of giving. It starts with our families in our own homes and extends out to those in our places of work, business, and leisure. All around us, there are people who stand to benefit from what God has given to us, which He then calls us to share with them. Now in this, we are indeed giving to God, but in a veiled way. Jesus made the promise that "whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do to Me" (Matthew 25:40). Jesus, who is God Incarnate, is hidden in our neighbors and that means that whatever we do to them, we do to God. So, by giving to our neighbors, we are giving to God, and all of it is a form and expression of thanksgiving for what God has given to us. After all, even the 10% tithe of crops given by the Israelites to God was used for fellow Israelites in that they were used for the cost of maintaining and building the Temple, supporting the priests, and caring for the poor. The crops were not given to God and then put away to rot in some storehouse. So it is with us and how we use what is given to God through the church.

This mention of the tithe brings us to a third question: *How much should I give?* The answer is this. The Bible gives us a clear model and example that we should start our giving at 10% of our income. The first illustration of this comes in Genesis 14 where we see the great patriarch, Abram (soon to be Abraham), having won a military victory over five kings and having rescued his captive nephew, Lot, from the hands of these kings by the hand of the Lord. After winning this victory, he is blessed by Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem (Jerusalem), with the gifts of bread and wine, and gives thanks to God by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything that he obtained through the war. In this, we get a wonderful picture of what Christian giving looks like. As I said before, the Lord Jesus Christ, He who feeds us on bread and wine, His body and blood, has blessed us richly and does bless us richly each week, and so we are called by Him to give back to Him at least 10% of what He has given to us.

No doubt this call to give 10% of our incomes may initially create some worry for us. Because we like to be in control – especially when it comes to our money -- we tend to have a hard time letting it go. As one of my seminary professors is fond of saying, “the pocketbook is always the last thing to be converted.” We tend to panic and worry that if we start to give like God calls us to give that we will run out of money for ourselves and our own needs. So, the Lord gives a promise to us to calm our fears and anxieties. In Malachi 3:10 He says: “‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows’.” God promises us that in giving, and giving faithfully, the 10% that He asks of us, He will bless us richly. We will not be in want or need; in fact, He promises to give so that “it overflows.” God never lies and what He promises holds true, and will hold true, *for you*.

All of this said, I am encouraging all of you to answer God’s call to tithe 10% of your income to Church of the Messiah in 2021, or to begin moving toward a tithe by increasing the percentage of your current giving. The money that you give here in faith and thankfulness to God is all used for the sake of others in their needs. Much like with the ancient Israelites, it’s used for the maintenance of the church building and property that we have been given the stewardship of, it is used for the salaries of those who work for the church, and it is also used to provide help to those in need outside our church walls in a number of different ways, including various missionary and outreach endeavors. On top of this, the money you give goes toward things that may seem mundane but serve as a blessing to your neighbor. The fact that we can keep our lights on and buildings heated and cooled means that people get to come and hear the Gospel each Sunday, to come and be united to Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament. The fact that you give money means that we can use that money to help our youth minister direct our Sunday School program and youth activities. The fact that you give money means that we can begin to implement the vision that the Vestry has to develop a church that is evangelistic and committed to getting out into our community to reach the unchurched and those who have drifted away from the church. It’s your faithful giving that will ensure that Church of the Messiah is equipped to carry out the mission of the Church that Christ has laid on us all to “Go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). So, I encourage all of you to give, give faithfully, and give generously for Jesus Christ’s sake, and knowing that you will do so, the Vestry and I thank you for faithfulness and generosity in giving this coming year.

Your spiritual father in Christ,
The Very Rev. Kyle R. Tomlin

Rector