



October 13, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What a year it has been so far! It is hard to believe that our last in-person gathering in the church building was on March 8th. That is about seven months ago, but at times, I have to say, it feels more like two years ago. So much has gone on since that time. I know that many of you would agree.

Despite all of the adjustments that we have had to make since March 8th, like moving to virtual worship and abstaining from Communion, one thing has been consistent, for which I am extremely thankful, and that has been your ongoing faithfulness in giving. Ever since the beginning of this pandemic, the Vestry and I have been overjoyed and humbled by the way that you have kept up your pledging and/or made extra contributions to the finances of our church. This is, of course, not true of every church, I am sad to say. But we have been very blessed and extremely thankful for the ways in which you have been faithful to God and to this part of the Body of Christ gathered at 12201 Spotswood Furnace Lane.

That said, we have once again arrived at the time of year in which we need to prayerfully consider our pledges for the upcoming year. Things this year, of course, will be a little different in how we go about doing this. Instead of receiving a packet at church with all your pledge information, this year you will be receiving this letter along with your pledge card both in the mail and in your email. What we are asking you to do is to take some time to pray about how much you should give for the coming year, to fill out your Pledge Card, and to mail that card back to us, either via snail mail or email at COMfola@comcast.net (the bookkeeper's private secure email address, which only she will see). The deadline to turn in all Pledge Cards will be **Sunday, November 1st**, All Saint's Day.

Which leads me back to the matter of giving itself. Very often, talk about giving tends to skew one of two ways. It is either overly practical or overly spiritual. In other words, it tends to be centered solely on the needs of the church or solely on our spiritual obligations to God. To skew either way, though, is, in fact, incorrect. The reality is that *giving is both a practical and a spiritual matter*.

The fact is that we are a community of Christ that has two buildings, a piece of property, and all the attendant expenses that go along with that, and that means that we are charged by God with being good stewards of these things, which means giving a percentage of our God-given money to see that these things are well-managed, so that in this place the Gospel can continue to

preached and Christ's people can continue to be strengthened in faith. That is the practical end of things. We do not receive any money from any other sources to keep the physical plant going for the sake of the Gospel, and we should not expect that money is just going to fall down from the sky like manna for us. No, we have an obligation, as a church family, to be good stewards of these things by giving of our God-given money for the proper use and upkeep of them.

At the same time, giving is very much a spiritual matter as well. In fact, giving is frequently a barometer of our faith, of our trust in God. What do I mean by this? Well, how free we feel we are to give can often be indicative of how much we trust God to provide for us. So, when we trust God only a little, we often tend to be fearful and stingy with our money. When we live under a theology of lack (the belief that God does not take care of us), we tend to hold on for dear life to what we have for fear that there might not be any more. On the other hand, when we trust God, when we trust in His goodness and mercy toward us, we generally feel the freedom to give, because we trust that God will continue to provide for us, as, in fact, He does. To sum it all up simply, *giving is a matter of faith.*

This, of course, leads to the one question that everyone always wants to ask: *How much should we be giving?* How much is the right amount of money to give? Well, the answer here requires a proper reading of the Scriptures, keeping in mind both context and authorial intention.

The Law given in the Old Testament to Israel says that the amount of money (actually, it talks about crops from your land rather than money, but money is something equivalent) that should be given is 10% of the gross. This is what Israel was called to do as a theocratic nation, and what they ultimately failed to do, hence the statements of judgment given to them in Malachi 3.8-12; God is exposing their failure to trust Him in these verses and even though He makes a promise to them if they returned to trusting Him as exhibited by their tithing, the history of Israel indicates that they never trusted God in this enough to act on it. What we need to realize, though, is that these verses were written *to* them, not to us. They were written, of course, *for* us, but there is a distinction to be had here; I will hold off on that for the moment though.

Under the New Covenant, in the New Testament, you will notice that there is no talk of giving the tithe. Why is this? Because giving, as Jesus lays it out, is at once both larger and freer. What does this mean? Well, the model of giving that Jesus gives us is found in Luke 21.1-4 where we see a widow giving all that she has into the Temple treasury. In this action, we see in the widow a foreshadowing of Christ's own all-in giving of Himself to death for us with the idea that just as Christ gave all for us, we are set free to have a heart that is ready to give all for others as well. And this giving, of course, is to be done freely. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 9.7: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (NRSV). So, the calling of the New Covenant is a calling to give freely and generously.

Which leads me back to my earlier comment about the words of Malachi being written *for* us, but not *to* us. We are not the people of ancient Israel. The words in the Old Testament were written to them. They were the intended audience for these words. That is why these words were not written directly *to* us. But there is still something to be gleaned *for* us from these words. And that is this: tithing (10% of your gross) is a good biblical model for us to use. In other words, it is a good place to start, but it is also not the be-all and end-all of our giving. No, our giving is meant to get off that launch pad in faith and be free and generous, recognizing two

things – that we give in thankfulness for all the abundant blessings that God has showered on us in Christ and that other people need our giving. It is both spiritual and practical, as I said earlier.

So, what the Vestry and I are asking you to do in preparation for this year's pledge season is to pray. If you are not yet tithing, pray about moving yourself in that direction. Even if you cannot commit to tithing, pray about increasing your pledge a little more this year. And if you are tithing, pray about the possibility of giving a little more beyond the tithe this year. In the freedom of the Gospel, there is no limit to the generosity we can show. And through it all, remember the words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what will you wear ... your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6.25, 32-33 NRSV).

As always, I am more than happy to talk with any of you about giving in general or about anything I have said above. I am certainly aware that based on what I have said some of you may have questions. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me either by phone or email if you would like to do so.

Once again, on behalf of the Vestry and myself, I want to thank you for taking time to read this letter, for your generous giving in 2020, and for your generous pledging for 2021! Because of your faithfulness, I am confident that we will be able to continue ahead in our mission to share the Gospel of Christ in the new decade.

Your servant in Christ,
Kyle+

Ph: (540) 786-3100 / www.churchofthemessiahva.org / cotmfredericksburg@comcast.net