

Commitment Sunday – November 19/20 2022

Greetings in the name of Christ our Savior and Lord:

I have been enjoying the conversations and sharing of our Fireside Chats (you can still sign up and participate!) Certain items continue to be at the forefront of our conversations: trusting the Lord; being kind to one another; determining GOD's will and purpose for us; and tackling various ministry needs and concerns. We agree that we all want the 'Church' to do something! Folks, we are the church! In Christ Jesus, God has made us members of His body, the Church. The commitments of the 'church' are but a direct reflection of our individual commitments as individual members, families and friends of Peace Lutheran Church.

I and others have a vision of seeing us tackle our remaining church debt. Also, we want to entertain the possible pathways to again have such things as an active and growing youth ministry, childcare ministry, Director of Christian Education & Outreach, etc. Much has been shared, much is being discussed (including how we can keep all of the congregation better informed about what is happening, and what is being considered). As we share in the Fireside Chats, we encourage all to prayerfully consider how God wants each of us to be part of His solution to the various opportunities for ministry we have at this time and place.

To help us determine where our 'commitment' is as we put together a balanced ministry support financial plan for 2023 – you are being asked to prayerfully consider your part in our commitment together to our Lord and the ministry God has given to us.

Please review the rest of this letter and the enclosed materials. Please join fellow members and friends of Peace as together we make a powerful statement of joining together in moving forward in ministry, making a response of joy and thanksgiving to God!

REMEMBERING WITH THANKS – First Fruits - Commitment Sunday

November 19/20, 2022
2022 Stewardship Encouragement Letter

To: Members and Friends of Peace Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, Minnesota

REMEMBERING WITH THANKS

It is good to remember that all of our blessings come from God, beginning with life and the ability to note and enjoy these blessings. In remembering, we give thanks to God (e.g. Thanksgiving Day). But our giving of thanks is more than just words. It is a life of thankfulness to God – continuous offerings of time, talents and treasures to God our Creator and Savior. A habit and exercise of thankfulness focused on God and not swayed or determined by what others around us may or may not do. It is part of our individual act of worship to God.

OUR GIVING BEGINS WITH GOD

We acknowledge that we often need to be reminded that God is the source of all that we have—that giving originates with Him. We acknowledge that God is really the owner of all that we see and have. He has made us managers—stewards—to manage all this with care. And He has showered that grace on us in abundance: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. . . Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your storage of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:8, 10).

Grace is the “undeserved love” that God gives us. Martin Luther talks of this and our response in his explanation of the 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason, and all my senses, and still

takes care of them. He also gives me He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him....

God has created us to reflect His pattern of giving in our life with Him and with others. Just as you and I would scatter seeds abroad when planting grass, so God scatters abroad His gifts to everyone—the poor as well as the rich. God is not stingy. He gives generously every day, year after year. For this we are thankful, and a thankful heart is a happy heart. It is a trusting heart. It is a heart full of praise. It is a heart that gives in return. When we are led by the Spirit to recognize and count our blessings, we are the healthiest and happiest in our hearts and our minds; we are able to approach life with an attitude of giving. Picture a hand that is planting seed liberally, and you see an open hand scattering seed (in contrast to a closed hand that is holding the seed tightly). This takes a trusting heart—the thankful heart of faith—because otherwise we would hoard that seed and not let go.

When yours is a trusting heart, God can accomplish what He wants through you. Indeed, the trusting heart of the Christian has a sense of expectation—of faith—that God, the ultimate Giver, will do what He wants through your life and the lives of others who also trust in Him. In everything good that takes place – to God be the glory!

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

God is not looking for a disinterested giver. He is not looking for a dutiful giver. He is looking for a joyful giver. He wants to know that you delight in giving. There are numerous examples of Christians who have found purpose, joy and fulfillment in faithful, proportionate first-fruit giving.

We find another fascinating example is the story of Zacchaeus who was a tax collector, despised by his fellow Jews. Zacchaeus experienced Jesus' unconditional love, and it changed his life. In response, Zacchaeus said he would gladly give away half of all that he owned and would reimburse anyone he had cheated in taxes four times what was taken. Someone might suggest Zacchaeus felt guilty, felt he needed to repay for what was wrongly done. But who gives "gladly" out of guilt? No, Zacchaeus had a thankful heart and found joy in giving in response to God's undeserved love and grace.

That's one of the characteristics of Christian giving. It is done cheerfully and with purpose (of expecting results). Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give; not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. . . You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:7, 11).

Your Christian giving is a commitment that comes from your heart, and should be one that both stems from joy and brings you joy.

There are pitfalls or difficulties to be careful of in giving. We are not to be forced into giving. Nor should we give out of guilt or out of just some emotional overflow (or rush) that causes us to regret later on. You are not to be sorry that you parted with your money. The Bible mentions not to give "under compulsion" which means giving under pressure. Rather, we are to give with a deliberate intention. For me personally, what has helped guide me is my desire to support the ministries that often get overlooked by the general population, like my local congregation where I worship and specific ministries of my church: local, district, worldwide missions.

Giving is to be done with forethought and planning. Each person should make up their mind after serious thought of how to honor God. The stewardship principle here is that giving should be an occasion for joy. The giver wants to give because they love Jesus. This honors God. We know that "God loves the cheerful giver. But it's not an easy thing to keep our motives in check, is it? Think of the many possible motives for giving: Sense of responsibility. Guilt. Compassion. Self-satisfaction. Love. Fear. Commitment. Public praise or acknowledgement. Thanksgiving. Reward. The reality for us Christians is that we are constantly at war with our sinful nature, and it's truly impossible for us, on our own, to be "holy" in our motivation for giving.

There's also the other side of the coin. We are often tempted to think of everything belonging to us instead of remembering that it all belongs to the Lord. We are but stewards of His blessings – all belongs to Him! People are blessed with resources from God but are confused about why He gave them those resources. They may think, "Perhaps it is so I can have a newer car, a longer vacation, or a nicer house." God's not against us having those things and enjoying them—unless we are no longer seeking first the kingdom of God and are simply using God for our own selfish purposes. What are our priorities? One key measure is what each of us does with the money and possessions we have in our control.

The truth is that God created and designed us in His image to give, not to hoard or squander. We are following our sinful nature when we are mainly prone to keep and not give. A heart that hoards is not a happy heart. It's not a trusting heart. At the end of the day, it is poorer, not richer for the experience. Marriage counselors will tell you: All other factors being equal, the people who are happiest in their marriages are the people who focus on giving, rather than taking.

So what are we to do? Of all the examples of God's grace, the one at the center is His sending Jesus into the world to die for our sins. When we could not do anything about our sin condition, God gave His very best: He gave the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to pay for our sins. That is the greatest example of giving the world has ever seen. Look to the cross of Christ; keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the perfecter of your faith. Trust in the hope you have in Him and Him alone, and you will find the joy of salvation that leads to Christian giving and the blessings it brings.

GREAT RESULTS OF GIVING

It is wonderful when we realize the promise of blessing which God attaches to our giving. The promise is that giving has great results. "The service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but also is overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, we will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else" (2 Corinthians 9:12-13).

So here are some encouragements today:

1. Look at the way God has blessed you with what you have. It all comes from His hand. And see His greatest love through Jesus given as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.
2. Realize that giving makes your heart healthy as you do it cheerfully in response to God.
3. Open your eyes to the blessings which result from giving to God and to others.
4. Close your eyes to what others may or may not be doing in their stewardship. Often many look to others to take the first step. Don't cede control of your choices in giving to others. Be willing to stand alone, if necessary, because our giving is all and only all about Jesus. Focus on Jesus and Him alone! Celebrate and reflect His love and grace in all that you say and do!
5. In whatever you decide to do, do so with joy and gratitude in your heart to God! You are loved by God, unconditionally! What a privilege God has given to us that we can be part of the ministry support and work that God has given to His people in this time and place here at Peace Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, Minnesota.

May the Holy Spirit keep your heart reflecting the image of God—giving generously, joyfully, and finding fulfillment in it! Amen

To God be the glory!

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Peace Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, Minnesota
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