

10-29-17 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“CATCH THE JOY OF GIVING” Bucyrus UMC Youth

God’s Word: Malachi 3:1-18 Text: 1 Timothy 6: 17-19

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

We were created to be generous. God created us with a willingness to give—to God and to others. It’s part of our make-up. We actually have a need to be generous. Yet there are two voices that “war” against our God-given impulse toward generosity, tempting us to keep or hoard what we have.

The first is the voice of fear. Fear of what might happen to us, along with a misplaced idea about the true source of our security, keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. The truth is that hoarding offers us no real security in this world.

The second voice that wars against our impulse toward generosity is the voice of self-gratification. Our culture tells us that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and the pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, *If I give, there won’t be enough left for me.*

So what do we do about these voices that keep us from being generous? That keep us from being all that God has called us to be? When we give our lives to Christ, invite him to be Lord, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to dissipate and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others. Although we still may wrestle with the voices from time to time, we are able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in Christ. And the more we grow in Christ, realizing that our lives belong to him, the more generous we become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth.

There are several Biblical reasons to give to God and to others...

- In Acts 20:35, Paul reminds the Ephesian Elders of what Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” In other words, we find more joy in doing things for other people and for God than we ever did in doing things for ourselves.
- Matthew 16:25 reminds us that in the very act of losing our lives, we find life.
- Psalm 24 reminds us that life is a gift, and everything belongs to God.

From the early days of the Old Testament, God’s people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best of what they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the first fruits or

the tithe, and it equaled one-tenth of one's flocks or crops or income. Abraham was the first to give a tithe or tenth after rescuing Lot in Genesis 14. Jacob gave a tenth of all that he had received in Genesis 28. In Leviticus 27, Moses shared with the Israelites what God had told him on Mt. Sinai. Everything they had was a gift from God, and God required a tithe or a tenth of all they owned. He even goes into great detail to spell out exactly what a tenth was.

We've looked at tithing in the Old Testament. But what does God expect of us today? Most of us Christians look back at the Old Testament tithe and say we think that's still a guide for our lives—a guide for what God would ask of us. And that tenth goes to accomplish the work of God's kingdom through the church. And the church, then, is responsible for praying and discerning. The lay people who are in charge of our church's finances are responsible for asking, "What does God want to do through us in the next year—through the resources that you have committed to God?" Yet even though we think the tithe is a good guide, it's a challenge.

Now when it comes to this idea of tithing it's ... challenging idea for many of us. I mean, it's a stretch, especially when you first start becoming a Christian and you're having those impulses, that war that's going on inside you between fear and the desire for pleasure. Give a tenth? You've got to be kidding. Now David Slagle, who's a pastor in Atlanta, had a wonderful, graphic way to illustrate how God sees this. And so I wanted to share that with you. God sees it—sort of your wealth and your income—like these ten apples that I have before me. And God says that nine of these are yours. Use them to take care of your family, to clothe yourselves. Use them for food and for shelter and set some of them aside for retirement and give some away to your friends and so are designed to be used for the poor and for pleasure and for trips and vacations.

You've got nine of these apples. But the Lord says, "One of them is mine. And it's meant to be used, first of all, as a way for you to express your praise and your love for me—your obedience and devotion. But then I'm going to use it to accomplish my purposes in the world."

But here's what happens with many of us. Many of us find—because the society is pulling us in so many directions—that nine apples aren't enough anymore. I mean, they really aren't. How can we do all the fun stuff and the cool stuff and the stuff we need to do and pay the bills and everything on just nine apples? And so we think, "Well the Lord's not going to mind if we just take a little bit." You know, there's a trip that we've been wanting to take. And it's really important and it's a special trip. And we're just going to take just a little bit of the Lord's apple. He'll understand. And then it's Christmastime and we didn't set anything aside for all these Christmas presents. And we need people to know...it's kind of giving. It's not to God, but it is to other people. It's to our children and others and so God will understand. We'll take a little more of God's apple.

And start thinking about retirement. It's coming up sooner than you think. And you know, I need to be setting aside more in retirement. But I can't stop spending from these apples. I've got to take from somewhere else. And I need them for medical emergencies because we didn't set aside emergency funds in our savings account. And it's time to get a new car. And then

there's that big screen right before the Super Bowl we've been talking about getting—and the new house. You know, our old house doesn't really satisfy us anymore and so there's that. And pretty soon there's not much left—I mean, from the Lord's apple. Wait a minute. Hold on. And then we say, “Well, Lord, this is your part. I'm going to give that to you.”

That is a graphic and humorous portrayal of what we know can happen in many of our lives. The pressures and distractions begin to consume us. By the time we get around to God, there is not much left. And we may even take one last bite before we offer it to God.

Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you cannot tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are, and God will help you make the adjustments necessary for you to become more and more generous.

Tithing is a floor, not a ceiling. God calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We should strive to set aside an additional percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects, schools, church building funds, and other nonprofit organizations.

How does our giving affect God? From the earliest biblical times, the primary way people worshipped God was by building an altar and offering the fruit of one's labors upon it to God. They would burn the sacrifice of an animal or grain as a way of expressing their gratitude, devotion, and desire to honor God. The scent of the offering was said to be pleasing to God. It wasn't that God loved the smell of burnt meat and grain. Rather, God saw that people were giving a gift that expressed love, faith, and the desire to please and honor God; and this moved God's heart. When given in this spirit, our offerings bless the Lord.

So how does God respond to our giving? Luke 6:38 says to “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” We are also told in Scripture that God loves a cheerful giver.

Our lives are also affected by our generosity, too. Through it our hearts are changed. When we are generous—to God and to our families, friends, neighbors, and others who are in need—our hearts are filled with joy. They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous.

When we are generous, we find the blessings of God. Many Christians have it wrong. They say that if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that is not how it works. We do not give to God so that we can get something in return. The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back to us. Of course, there is no guarantee that if you tithe you will never lose your job or never have other bad things happen to you. Nevertheless, when we give generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.