

“LIVING BY FAITH, GIVING BY FAITH.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

March 27, 2022, 10:30 AM

Texts for the Sermon: Exodus 35:4-8; 20-22; 36:3-7

Prayer: Holy Father, open our eyes and ears that we might receive from you all that your Spirit says to us today. Remove blindness, dullness, deafness, and stir up our hearts as you did your people of old. Holy Spirit, be for us a living, refining fire. For the sake of Jesus, Amen.

Introduction.

The Phase III building the future proposal that has been presented to us is no doubt one of the biggest things we have done in the lifetime of anyone in this flock. This is bigger than Phase I and Phase II put together.

A month ago I called us to begin praying in earnest for God’s wisdom, will and leading. This morning we enter into the next step, the pledge process. For the next five weeks I encourage all of us to continue to pray and ask God to show us what He wants to do and how He will provide for this.

You have seen the concept drawings, you have read or heard the vision behind them. A great team of people in our flock have been working on this for over five years. From the input received at the townhall meeting adjustments and improvements will be made. And based on the pledges we will see what God will enable us to do.

Exodus 35-36.

Our texts this morning give us Israel’s first building project, their Phase I was build a tabernacle. Five hundred years later they would build Phase II, the temple. You could say that as church building projects go we are moving at lightning speed. We are up to Phase III in only 20 years.

There are some differences between their building project and ours.

First, God gave directly to Moses the detailed architect drawings. God gave precise instructions and measurements for how to make everything that would go in the tabernacle, even down to the clothes the priests should wear. Eight chapters of Exodus are devoted to how to build it.

Then, God became the project manager and got all His own sub-contractors. He gave specific Spirit-anointed gifts, abilities and talents to specific people to do each task.

Finally, God stirred the hearts of the people to supply all the building materials, to raise all the funds for the project. God was the architect, the project manager and the fundraiser.

God has not dropped our architectural plans from heaven, but He has provided people with those skills. There are people able to do all the tasks necessary to build the building.

So we are now at the “stir the hearts of the people” stage. Consider with me several ways in which what God did in building the tabernacle applies to us. We will consider *four things*: who should give, how should we give, what should we give and how much we should give.

Who should give?

Moses spoke to all the congregation, vs. 35:4

He gathered the whole church family, everyone, men and women, rich and poor, young and old. When God wants to do something in our world and lives, He doesn't just do it Himself, He doesn't send down a bunch of angels to do it. He uses people, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, all of them sinners. He invites us to participate with Him, to share together in His mission and work.

A team of our brothers and sisters have devoted much time, energy and prayer to seek to help us do something for God that will benefit and bless many, now and for years to come.

Consider how we are part of a body of Christ, we are all in this together, so let's participate in this together. How many of us appreciate Phase II and see what a blessing it has been? Everyone who will be blessed by what God does should participate.

I'm not giving to Phase III because I think it is perfect or because it gives me everything I want or like. I'm not giving because I will benefit from it for a long time. I'm giving because we are family, we are in this together, and I trust the sovereign God to work all things according to His will and plan. I am willing to put the family ahead of my own preferences.

I invite all of us to give something, to share the load, to share the privilege, to share the blessing. I am moved to invest in something bigger than me and that will outlast me. I am moved by Jesus' challenge to lay up treasures in heaven. I am moved because I love this church, I love this flock. I want to give to the future generations who will worship and be ministered to here.

How should we give?

Whoever is of generous heart, vss. 35:5, 21.

Remember last Sunday when I got emotional when my son Todd and granddaughter carried in the Albanian flag. It was just a flag, right? What's the big deal. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also. Our church in OKC was heavily invested in the planting and building of the church in Albania for 15 years.

Albania was my first overseas mission trip, it was a time when God took me way beyond my comfort zone and stretched me to walk by faith and not by sight, not by my ability. I experienced the grace of God in powerful ways.

Phama and I and our church invested in those people, prayed for those people, loved those people, and gave tens of thousands of dollars. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.

Where is your treasure? What have you invested in that is of eternal value, eternal significance? Where is there a place when you think about it your heart is stirred, your eyes well up with tears?

How many of us have treasures laid up here, to the point your heart is moved when you think about First CRC and what God has done here, how God has ministered to you, fed you, given you some sense of purpose as you share your gifts with others?

Has God been generous to you here? Is your heart generous toward God? Does it want to be? We can gather from the texts that there were two kinds of people in the congregation of Israel, those whose hearts were stirred by a generous spirit and those who were not. Would you like to have a different heart toward this place than you do now? Would investing, putting some real skin in the game make that difference?

Notice the giving is free from coercion, it is voluntary. No tricks, no gimmicks, no hard sell, no guilt or shame. Moses announces what the Lord commanded, appeals to them to have generous hearts, and then leaves it to see whose hearts are stirred to bring a contribution to the Lord.

Their giving is from a heart of love for God, from a desire for His presence to be with them, from a heart of gratitude for all that God has done for them, from faith in God's promises and what He will continue to do.

What we give to God and what we do for God is acceptable to Him when it comes from the willing hearts of a willing people. God wants our hearts more than anything else. Do what you do from a willing heart, a joyful heart, a giving heart.

Generosity comes only from a new heart, a heart transformed by the grace of God. The Israelites had been delivered from slavery, from the angel of death, their lives had been saved. They gave out of a sheer desire and wish to give. They wanted to be a part of blessing God.

What should we give?

Gold, silver, bronze, yarns, fine linen, goatskins, vss. 35:5-6

There is a mystery here. These are the children of Israel, living in tents in the wilderness, who had hastily departed Egypt with just whatever they could carry. Certainly over a few months' time in the wilderness no one had time to accumulate wealth and assets. Where did they get all these precious metals and building supplies?

Exodus 12:36 The Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

So what does that mean? It means what they had, they had by the grace of God, not their own doing. But isn't that true for all of us, all that we have is by the grace of God. He is the one who enriches us. Ultimately you can track and trace every gift back to God's grace. We only ever give what the Lord has already given to us.

I Chronicles 29:14 But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.

Remember all we have is from God, all we give He has already given us.

Notice the wide range of the gifts. Everyone was able to participate, one bringing gold and one bringing goatskins. A person out of their poverty was able to bring a gift, and their gift was no less acceptable to God than the rich person who gave out of their abundance.

Some of you can bring gold, some silver, some goatskins. Those who can give gold should give gold, not just bronze. If you can give fine twined linen, don't just give goatskin.

Remember how Paul commended the churches in Macedonia who "gave according to their means, ... and beyond their means, of their own accord" (II Corinthians 8:3).

If you wish you could give more but all you have is goatskin, then give it gladly knowing God knows your heart and receives your gift. God doesn't look at the amount on the check, He looks at the attitude of the heart.

To you who are rich, this opportunity is God's grace to you, to exercise your faith.
To you who are poor, this opportunity is God's grace to you, to be able to participate.

Barnabas gave by selling some of his land. A little boy gave his lunch, a couple of loaves and some fish to Jesus. An old widow gave her two copper coins, a widows mite, that is remembered and honored in Scripture to this day. Zacchaeus gave four times what he had taken.

We did a fundraising campaign in our last church by encouraging families to do something together. Have a garage sale or a bake sale and give some or all of it to the building the future fund. One family gave the church their used minivan. Some kids gave from their babysitting money, some from their allowance, some from their summer job. Could you sell something on Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace?

Have you received extra, an inheritance, a windfall, a return on an investment? Consider what a willing and generous heart, stirred by the Holy Spirit, would do for future generations for the glory of God.

Don't wait to see what everyone else will do. That's not how Scripture calls us to give. God knows your heart and God knows your checkbook, your savings accounts and your portfolio.

God wants you to look in your own heart and at your own finances and decide in your own heart what you will do, regardless of what others do or don't do. Give out of what He has given you.

How much should we give? Giving by sight or giving by faith.

Then all the congregation departed from the presence of Moses, vs. 35:20.

The whole congregation left Moses and went back to their own tents and had conversations about what and how much they should give toward this Phase I tabernacle project. How do you suppose those conversations went? People are people, we haven't changed much in the past 3,500 years. I think we can guess the kind of debate they had between the flesh and the spirit.

They got out their piggy banks, their checkbooks, their latest statements from the bank or investment firm, they looked at how many tents they owned, how many four legged cars they had. They looked at their expenses. What did they need, what did they have, what was doable?

It is what we all struggle with, living by sight and living by faith, giving by sight and giving by faith.

What is giving by sight? Giving by sight is looking at what you have, thinking about what you need, thinking about what you can do without, what is extra, what won't hurt too much to give.

The first number we decide we can give, is most likely a giving by sight number. I urge you to stop and think about what giving by faith might look like. It will be a number that should stretch you, a number that might cost you, or set back some other plans you had for that money. It will be the kind of number that would come from a person in whom the Holy Spirit stirred their heart and moved them to do more than their flesh would have considered. It will be a number that will reflect Jesus, His sacrifice, His generosity, His blessings to you so that having been so blessed you can be a blessing.

When you look at the pledge card there are twelve numbers on there. The first number you gravitate to will likely be a number you are comfortable with, that will be your sight giving. Before you circle it, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to stir your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit what He would have you give by faith, faith that even though you might not have all of it now, faith that God will provide.

Giving by faith might meant taking the first number you thought of and increasing it. Maybe you move up a number or two on the pledge card, or maybe you double your original or add a zero to it.

Whatever you give I encourage you to let the Spirit stir you to give by faith, trusting God to supply what is lacking, and see how God will reward your faith, with joy, with blessings. You can't out give God.

Before you just pick a convenient number, go home, pray, wait, listen, test, then decided. Take into consideration all that you already possess and where it all came from and then prayerfully consider how much of it you will set aside to be the Lord's.

Give in a way that makes your heart glad before God, and not before man. Give in the same spirit as the Lord gives. Give for the glory of the Lord in this place. Give for the future generations that will worship and serve and be ministered to here.

Conclusion and application.

This is one of those rare moments in Scripture when the people of God did the right thing and in the right way with the right heart. It was beautiful to behold and the result was truly astonishing. They kept on giving until there was more than enough sufficient for the work.

They didn't give like the devil, they gave like God who delights to give, loves to bless, and gives more than we ask or imagine, and certainly more than we deserve.

Matthew 6:19-21 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.