

“THE WAY OF THE CROSS”

2nd Sunday after Christmas January 4, 2009
2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Mark 12:28-34

Introduction:

Today we begin our Stewardship emphasis for 2009. Stewardship is how we fund and staff our ministry here at Holy Cross. Today I will try to explain what we are doing, and why we are doing it.

Typically, when people hear the term Stewardship they automatically think MONEY. I'm going to mention money but that is near the bottom of my personal motivation to discuss stewardship.

The Stewardship Challenge:

The challenge of stewardship is to reach an understanding that our entire life belongs to God. We can't buy God off with our money but we can hinder our spiritual growth by refusing to see our finances in a the greater context of being a faithful steward of our lives.

In that context I want to mention tithing. The challenge is to develop a tithing mentality with our time, our talent, and our treasure. Tithing is never easy, but it is always rewarding.

Simply, a tithe is giving God ten percent. Simple, isn't it? But 10 % of what? Of your life, that's what: your Time, Your Talent, and Your Treasure. Let's

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look at how we spend our time for a moment.

In a 24 hour day your tithe would be 2.4 hours given to God. “But”, you say, “I can’t possibly tithe the time I’m sleeping ,and so forth.” OK, so take 8 hours off the 24, and you have 16 hours left. A tithe of 16 hours is 1.6 hours. So, let’s say your Time and Talent tithe amounts to 1.5 hours – or 90 minutes each day.

The question is: “How do you give God your 90 minutes?” Here are a few suggestions how to spend your Time / Talent tithe:

Prayer – Part of each day should be spent in prayer – prayer for you seeking God’s guidance, strength, or forgiveness; prayer for your family; prayer for Others such as those on our prayer list in the bulletin; or you can join the Prayer Chain and be up on current prayer needs.

Bible & Devotional Reading – Make a commitment to read through the Bible. Devote so many of your minutes to a regular reading of the Bible. Start at the Beginning and read it through. You won’t understand everything you read, but you won’t regret doing it. You will have special meeting times with God as you read His Word.

Doing Something For God - As you pray and read the Bible, or other good devotional material, you are

going to be led to do something that God wants you to be involved in. On “The Way of The Cross” commitment form, there are 84 suggestions on how you can do something for God, and places for you to suggest other ways.

When make that stewardship commitment to be available to God for your talents and spiritual gifts to be used for God then Godly opportunities will come your way. You’ll be alert each day for ways to do something to help someone else – in Jesus’ Name.

OK, so I’ve mentioned tithing our Time and our Talent. What about

Tithing Our Treasure?

The same 10% principle applies here as well. It should be right off the top – gross pay. But, like the 24 hours minus the sleeping thing, some of you will say, “I’m going to tithe what’s left after the government gets theirs. The government first, then God.

Listen, I’m not going to argue with you. It’s between you and God. Your financial pledge is not to me. It is really not to Holy Cross. It is to God. But, I do exhort you to pray about it and think about it. Jesus said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar; and to God what belongs to God.” Now, what is our ministry that I’m asking you to

fund and staff? It is

A Ministry of Reconciliation,

and it has three directions.

Our lesson, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, lays out St. Paul's teaching regarding the Ministry of Reconciliation. Your "The Way of The Cross" time and talent commitment form quotes the key verse, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and to us he has given the ministry of reconciliation".

We are Christ's body for here and for now. Jesus' ministry of reconciliation is supposed to be working through us. So, who are we suppose to be helping people be reconciled to?

The Gospel lesson from Mark 12:28-34 provides the answer:

We are to love the Lord our God how? With our entire heart, mind, soul, strength, and Our neighbor as our self.

There are three directions reconciliation is suppose to take place:

Upward to God

Outward to our Neighbor

Inward to our self.

This church – our ministry – has to help people

love themselves. Why?

Many people are damaged emotionally for various reasons: childhood scars from an abusive home; personal guilt from participation in grievous sin; real bad choices in life that have left you in a mess; unforgiveness toward others; addictions to alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or food, or pornography, or whatever.

These things need to be dealt with so you can be as healthy as possible as you seek to love your neighbor and love God with our mind, soul, body and strength.

We've already have in place the sponsorship of a very active AA Group that meets here at Noon. We have Intercessory Prayer Warriors; a Ritual of Personal Confession and Absolution. And, God will add more as we are ready and faithful.

This church is committed to loving others and the more healthy we are individually the more accepting and less judgmental we will be of others. I have found you to be a very loving and accepting congregation and that is an essential plus that God can build upon.

The truth is we need more Others here, don't we? We have lots of room to grow. We need babies, and children and youth, and young adults and families, and

singles, and well – you get it.

It all begins with knowing we are forgiven and loved by God through our own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Then, we can love others and then God will give us more people to love. We are to love God with everything we are and have: our time, our talent, our treasure, our strength, our whole being.

The Ministry of Reconciliation is

The Umbrella Under Which We Operate

as a Christian Church.

The drip points of the umbrella are the different ministries in which we are involved – the different activities in which we participate. And, if any of those drip points are not somehow serving the purpose of helping people be reconciled to God, to others, and to themselves, then they have to go.

This is what the Way of The Cross is about.

Please take time to review the Commitment Forms. Pray! How does God want you to serve? Where is your time to be spent? Where is your strength to be used? How much spiritual growth does God want you to experience this year? What will be the depth of your financial commitment – 1%, 5%, 7%, 10%?

Shannon and I are tithers and 2nd Mile Givers.

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We give 10% of our Gross income to Holy Cross Church – about \$10,000 a year – and we give other dollars to various needs that come up throughout the year from Alzheimer’s research to Angle Tree, to helping a neighbor.

Tithing was one of the hardest spiritual struggles I ever had. Could I trust God by giving 10% off the top? When I first came under conviction to begin tithing I didn’t believe I could afford it, or that it would work. So I wrote down my income and all of my expenses. The expenses were greater than the income. I held my worksheet up to the ceiling and said, “See God. It won’t work!” But God didn’t release me from the conviction to give it a try. God knew I needed that particular growth in my life. Could I trust God with everything? I tried it. It worked, and I’ve never stopped tithing.

We are a tithing church, and we give 2nd mile to other needs throughout the year.

I don’t want you to tithe out of quilt, or because you are trying to please me. I’m not even saying this is the year God wants you to begin tithing. I don’t know that. However, if God is prompting you to start tithing, then I want to encourage you to trust God. Therefore, your Vestry and I want to make this offer to you.

It is a money-back guarantee. If you start tithing

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and at any time during the first 90 days you determine that God is not in this at this time in your life – you can't pay your bills, or don't have food on the table, you can get your money back. Just come to me and say: "Richard, it is not working in my life at this time." I will see you are reimbursed for everything you have given above what your normal amount of giving used to be.

That is what God is saying in the Malachi verse quoted on your Financial Pledge form. "Test me in this, says God"