

October 18, 2020

II Corinthians 9:6-8

Matthew 6:19-21

Many of you will soon receive a letter from Amicable with a pledge sheet enclosed, asking you to make a financial commitment to Amicable Church in the coming year. You may not know this, but we intentionally ask for your pledge commitment before you have a chance to see the proposed budget. This is because we want you to make a financial commitment to the church based on your income and desire to commit yourself to our church's mission. We don't want you to give in order to meet the financial needs of the church (as important as that is), rather we want you to give, generously, because you have been so generously blessed and the work of our church has been such a blessing in your life and in the lives of so many others. BUT of equal importance to one's giving out of gratitude, giving generously to the church is both an act of faith and a way to grow one's faith.

Growing faith is more of a heart, than a head, issue. It seems our head is convinced we never have enough, but our heart knows it is important to share. In today's Gospel lesson Jesus encourages people to store up treasures that do not rust or get eaten by worms. He is discouraging consumerism and encouraging deepening relationships. But the most important thing comes at the end, when Jesus points out, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The evangelist Billy Graham said this in a slightly different way, "Give me five minutes with a person's checkbook and I will tell you where their heart is." Today Billy Graham would be wanting to look at our credit card bills.

Is your monthly gym membership fee more than you give to Amicable Church each month? How much, each week, do

you spend on a Dunkin' Donut's coffee? Is it more than you pledge to Amicable weekly? There is no doubt that most of us put more money into our homes and our groceries than our church. If you are like me, these are very important, life-necessary bills. My home is my castle, it is where my treasure and my heart is, so I want to make it a special place. (And I will rejoice the day my co-owner – the bank – is no longer a partner in my "castle".)

I dwell on my house here, because it has been the cause of faith growth in my life. Like just about everyone I have talked to, when one buys their first home, the mortgage seems impossibly large, and they begin to lose sleep out of fear they will not be able to pay it off; fear they will lose everything and be left with nothing. In addition, Bente started college that year. So, I have been there and done that. For months I worried. Then I asked myself, "Don't you have faith that God will take care of you?" To which I responded with one of my favorite Bible quotes: "I believe, help my unbelief!" So, I prayed, for faith and for calm. Then, I kept a sharp eye on our family's ability to pay our bills. I paid attention. To my surprise, when I paid bills, we always seemed to have enough, even when I thought we would fall short. There were times when a birthday check came at the perfect moment or I would discover an arithmetic error on my part, which covered what I thought was a shortage. Somehow, month after month, we were able to pay our bills. Yes, there were times when we chose not to go somewhere or buy something because there wasn't enough money, but despite this new debt, our mortgage, and college we were, and are, able to pay our bills, including our financial support of Amicable Church. I haven't lost sleep over my mortgage for years now.

Of course, we – Barbara and I – have had the good fortune of being fully employed. I know there are people unemployed and under-employed; people who work 2 and 3 minimum wage jobs and still they struggle. I know the system is, in so many ways, rigged for the elite, for people like me. But, for the most part, my sermon today is not for those people oppressed by a rigged system. It is to you, the members and friends of Amicable Church. There are very few, if any of you, who are being threatened with losing your home or going to bed hungry. If so, please contact me. I know there are those in our church who know how to stretch a dollar so much better than I ever could.

Still, for almost all of you listening to this virtual worship service, we have been abundantly blessed, and Paul's stewardship appeal, his reminding the Corinthians of their pledge of financial support for the Jerusalem church, is a call to us: "The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." I am appealing to you to "sow bountifully"; to challenge yourself to sow bountifully through your pledge of financial support to Amicable Church. If you are already pledging, then consider increasing your pledge by 1% of your pretax income. If you are new to pledging, then look at your pretax income for this year and pledge 1% of it to support Amicable's ministries.

Here are two reasons I am giving you this challenge. The first is the fact that giving of time, talent, and treasure is an act of faith. To increase your giving is a way to make you more mindful not only of how and on what you spend your time and income, but mindful of God. Each time you go to pay your bills or volunteer at the church, you will be thinking about God and whether God will really help you meet your basic needs; whether Paul was right when he

wrote, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance." And, you will be growing your faith in this way.

The other reason to give generously to Amicable Church is Amicable is the best way to answer the question so many have been asking me lately: In the face of systemic racism and systemic oppression what can I do to help change the system? The answer: Support our ministries with your time, talents, and wealth. We are helping to feed the hungry through our Thanksgiving Basket Project, helping to house the homeless through our Homeless Awareness Weekend, helping to clothe the naked through our thrift store, helping to welcome the outcast through our rainbow doors and presence at Pride Fest. Our building is a place of welcome for all and we are learning through seminars and conversations about systemic racism and oppression. All these things are moving us closer to a world where the love of God reigns.

Faith growth and systemic changes are just two of many reasons I am challenging you to commit your treasure and your heart to the ministry of Amicable Church. It is my prayer, when you receive the stewardship letter with pledge sheet, you will prayerfully and generously choose to make a pledge commitment to both grow your faith and grow the ministries of Amicable Church through your gifts of time, talent, and wealth. I do believe giving to support Amicable's ministries will grow your faith and benefit you.

As much as I hope you will make a strong, generous pledge with the desire to grow our mutual ministries, I leave you with Paul's words: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Amen.