

PASTOR SCOTT'S

MONTHLY MESSAGE



“Four Letter Words”

I am going to use a dreaded four letter word. Just a warning, for such foul four letter words may make you uncomfortable. No, it is not *that* four letter word ... but close. It is the disquieting “G” four letter word - “**give**.” “Give”, and its derivatives (giving, giver, ...) shows up about three times as often as “love” does in the Bible. I, too, will be using that “G” word frequently in this article - and “love” not once. Be forewarned!

In many instances *give*'s use in the Bible is in relation to God or Christ giving something to us. But often it is about us giving something to, or sharing something with, God or others. There are a large number of reasons why we are called to give, but I want to focus on just one today.

While this has been the case through history, but particularly in our time and society *possession* is viewed as *ownership*, that if we possess an item or talent - then it is ours! Of course that is a great fallacy. In Matthew 22:21, Jesus tells the Pharisees and Herodians (and us) to “**Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.**” Notice, there is no “... *and keep what is yours*” portion to this quote.

All that we have - possessions, skills, life itself, the earth - is simply God's! We are but a temporary steward of such. Our job is to care for, tend, manage, employ, and/or grow these gifts that belong to God. In other words, we are to use these gifts in a fashion that is pleasing to the giver, to God.

But we tend to view these things as ours. Earlier in Matthew 21 is the parable of the landowner who plants a vineyard and rented it to some farmers. When it came time to give some of the harvest back to the landowner, the farmers didn't want to give up what was in their possession, what was “theirs.” They beat and even killed not to.

Caroline Weldon was a young widow from NY who traveled west in the 1880s to paint a portrait of Sitting Bull. She met with significant resistance from settlers, the military, and even Sitting Bull himself. Sitting Bull did eventually agree. During their time together painting, Sitting Bull observed to Ms. Weldon “Your society values people by how much they have, ours by how much they give away.” Then, and even more now, this notion that stuff actually belongs to us is part of the very fabric of our society - everything from “my money,” to “my land,” to “my rights.”

One of the functions of giving is to reorient our perspective from *ownership* to *stewardship*. To enlighten us that we are caring for entities placed in our oversight for a period of time, by God. Jesus understood the pull of money and possession upon us; that is why wealth and its management is the subject of the greatest number of his parables. Through the act of giving we weaken, even break, the siren of “ownership.” God and Christ call upon us to give, to serve (giving of ourselves), and to share. In Matthew 5:42 Jesus instructs us, “**Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.**” This four letter “G” word is messy!

This is a time to think more deeply about stewardship. We are quickly approaching our season of “thanksgiving.” In the midst of a pandemic, how do we practice stewardship? What place does being a steward of what we've been blessed with play in our personal relationship with God?

Last year we asked you to pray (that is “talk with God”) about your stewardship and consider what percentage of your income or amount you would give to FPC. We asked that you write that figure on a provided index card. This act of generosity is between you and God. You sealed that card in an envelope and signed your name across the seal. We asked you to drop the envelope in a basket on Stewardship Sunday. The church never opened the envelope - we just noted who had dropped one off and mailed the envelope containing the card back to you.

In your conversations with God, think about the idea that giving has nothing to do with the financial needs of the church (yes, this “give” word keeps stirring up all kinds of trouble).

Of course, churches have financial needs, and hopefully they are aligned with the mission of making disciples. However, whether and how much an individual or family gives is not dependent upon the needs of the church. Giving is a spiritual discipline and an aspect of our relationship with God. We do not give to the Church, but rather we give to God through the Church.

This year, we are not gathering for worship in November, so dropping anything in a basket is challenging - unless you have the gift of teleportation (for those of you with such a gift we'll leave a basket on the communion table). For the rest of us, be in prayer with God about your giving for 2021, and then physically note it on something for you to keep - an index card, the back of a napkin (many a great idea has started there), a post-it note on your bathroom mirror, ... Then I ask that you drop me an email (swipperman@mac.com), or send me a note through the mail, that you have spoken with God about your intentions. Do not include your commitment to God, just a note that you have rested in the presence of God with this question of stewardship. Thank you.

Aside from the two goals of reorienting our perception about what we “own” and deepening our relationship with God through prayerful conversations about stewardship - another goal is that through this engagement with God you will also come to see “give” as a *beautifully joyous* four letter word.

Peace,
Pastor Scott