

As Soon As The Order Went Out
Message for North East United Methodist Church
March 3, 2019
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PRAYER

As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the first fruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything. The men of Israel and Judah who lived in the towns of Judah also brought a tithe of their herds and flocks and a tithe of the holy things dedicated to the LORD their God, and they piled them in heaps. They began doing this in the third month and finished in the seventh month. When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw the heaps, they praised the LORD and blessed his people Israel.

Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the heaps; and Azariah the chief priest, from the family of Zadok, answered, "Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the LORD has blessed his people, and this great amount is left over."

-2 Chronicles 31: 5-10

As soon as the order went out...

The Bible describes Hezekiah this way...2 Kings 18: 5-6, ***"He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses."***

When Hezekiah became king in Judah, in the year 715 BC, the people had turned to worshipping idols and copying the heathen customs of other nations...Hezekiah began to call the people back to God.



Altars, idols, and heathen temples were destroyed.



Even the bronze serpent Moses had made in the wilderness was not spared because it had ceased to point the people to God and had also become an idol. The temple in Jerusalem, whose doors had been nailed shut was cleaned out, purified, and reopened. The Passover was reinstated. And Hezekiah reinstated the practice of tithing – giving a tenth of one’s income to God’s work.

Like Hezekiah and the people of Judah, at times we fall away from God and need leaders to call us back...to help us tear down the idols we have built, to help us clean out our temples, our hearts, and to remind us to give.

Jesus knew how powerful an influence money was... how we would begin to trust in it rather than trust in God...how easily we could hoard it, desire it, obsess over it, worry about it...how hard we would work for it...how it would draw us away from God and doing God’s work... Jesus knew...It is why Jesus said,



“No servant can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve both God and Money.” —Luke 16:13
NIV

15% of everything Jesus spoke of dealt with money and possessions. It is so important that the church speaks about money, about giving, because as Randy Alcorn writes, *“There’s fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money. We may try to divorce our faith and our finances, but God sees them as inseparable.”*

Rev. M. R. Watkinson recognized this truth. In 1961, he wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury appealing to the Treasury Department to recognize Almighty God in some form on the country’s currency. He wrote, *“This would relieve us from the ignominy of heathenism. This would place us openly under the Divine protection we have personally claimed.”*

Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, asked the Director at the Mint in Philadelphia to prepare a motto to be printed on the nation’s currency. Chase wrote, *“No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins.”*

Four words were lifted up, printed on our currency, reminding us of the One whom we give credit for our freedom, our victories, and our blessings... ***“In God We Trust.”***

“In God We Trust.”

Perhaps the question we truly need to ask when it comes to our giving...when it comes to the issue of money...is *“Can we truly say, ‘In God We Trust?’”*

If we struggle with trusting God with our money, our futures, our welfare...we are certainly not the first to do so...Certainly the Israelites had a great deal of trouble saying these four words, *“In God We Trust.”*

In the book of Exodus, we read the story of Moses, rescuing and leading the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. God speaks through Moses, bringing ten plagues down upon the Egyptians...turning water into blood; plagues of frogs, gnats, flies; the death of all Egyptian livestock; boils; hail; locusts; darkness; and finally, the death of the firstborn. Egypt suffers all of these plagues, while the Israelites are spared. Finally, Pharaoh allows the Israelites to leave, but soon Pharaoh follows, too prideful to give in, unwilling to let go, soon chasing after the Israelites through the desert, cornering them against the Red Sea.

What is the first response of the Israelites?

Exodus 14:10-14 (The Message) - *As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and saw them—Egyptians! Coming at them! They were totally afraid. They cried out in terror to God. They told Moses, “Weren’t the cemeteries large enough in Egypt so that you had to take us out here in the wilderness to die? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? Back in Egypt didn’t we tell you this would happen? Didn’t we tell you, ‘Leave us alone here in Egypt—we’re better off as slaves in Egypt than as corpses in the wilderness.’” Moses spoke to the people: “Don’t be afraid. Stand firm and watch God do his work of salvation for you today. Take a good look at the Egyptians today for you’re never going to see them again. God will fight the battle for you. And you? You keep your mouths shut!”*

Their first response...after all God had done for them...provided them... *“Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt? Why did you make us leave?”*

“In God We Trust.” Are we any different from the Israelites? When things are falling apart around us; when we are being oppressed and beaten down; when we are fearful of the future and not sure where to go next; when we are facing “our giants;” do we find ourselves trusting God or do we find ourselves trusting the things of this world?

Why did Jesus talk about money so much? Because how we spend our money, how much we focus on money, how unwilling or willing we are to give away money, says a lot about our relationship with God and how willing we are to trust Him with our future.

I remember an old Science Fiction film from the 80's called *They Live*. The film is about aliens oppressing people through subliminal media advertising. People cannot see the aliens or their messages without putting on a special pair of glasses which allows them to see the secret messages surrounding them...messages that are secretly influencing them. When the main character first puts on the glasses, he sees on all paper money, not the words, "*In God We Trust*," but instead the words, "*This Is Your God*."



Our giving is not an issue about money. Our giving is an issue about trust...about faith...about understanding what God has done for us through Christ and wanting others to know that truth as well.

We shouldn't give because we feel obligated...or because we feel pressured...or because the church has bills to pay... We should give out of our relationship with Jesus Christ...out of gratitude for all God has done for us. As Paul wrote, "*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*"—II Corinthians 9:7 (NIV).

I believe there are three main reasons people do not give sacrificially...why ministries continue to struggle...

1. **Materialism has penetrated our lives**...We have so much more than we need...and we constantly are wanting more...
2. **We truly don't understand** what Jesus Christ did for us...If we did...if we truly understood **His sacrifice** we couldn't help but to give...we couldn't help but want the church to connect with others through ministry and mission, teaching them about the love of God...we couldn't help but want the church to be here a hundred years from now impacting countless generations yet unborn.
3. We say we believe but **deep down we don't trust God**...our lack of trust in God shines through in our lack of giving...do we really trust God to take care of us...to provide for our needs...for our futures...

In Exodus 36, Moses calls on the people of Israel to give in order to build the tabernacle. Listen to what happens.

“And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, “The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do.” So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, “Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary.” And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much.”

...indeed too much... Can you imagine? The lives God could touch through this church? The difference God could make through each of us?

As soon as the order went out...

Our church, North East United Methodist Church, like many other congregations across our country, struggles to meet its budget. Our Sunday offerings do not bring in enough to cover salaries, supplies, utilities, youth and children’s ministry, small groups, worship, hospitality, missions, outreach events, and countless other expenses.

We give God thanks for those who heard the order and answered in the past, giving North East United Methodist Church an endowment from which, we can pull funds when we are unable to meet our obligations, but this gift will not last forever nor is it supposed to.

Regardless of our needs as a church, do not give because we have bills to pay...do not give because your pastor preached this sermon...do not give because you feel guilt or obligated...pray about your giving and give what God lays on your heart to give...give from your heart...out of love and gratitude for the One who has given you so much...given you so much through this church and its people...through His Son, Jesus Christ...

I simply ask you to pray about your giving in 2019.

Pray about your weekly giving; if everyone simply raised their weekly gift a few dollars it would make a tremendous difference in the life and ministry of our church. Remember, when you miss a Sunday, to give not only for the Sunday you return but for the one you were absent.

Pray about a one-time gift in 2019 to help us with our budget or a one-time gift to our endowment that can, through investment and interest, help our ministry for years to come.

Pray about putting the church, North East United Methodist Church in your will, leaving a legacy beyond your time on earth and helping this church remain on this corner in North East, Maryland for decades to come, impacting countless more lives for Christ.

Pray that God will show you how you might help, not only the church, with the resources He has blessed you with, but your neighbors, your community, those God will have cross your path in the weeks and months and years to come.

Pray that God will fill your heart with gratitude and generosity, that God will fill your heart with the love of Christ.

The Virginia Gazette on July 18th, 1777 read, *“Thus may the 4th of July, that glorious and ever memorable day, be celebrated through America, by the sons of freedom, from age to age till time shall be no more. Amen and Amen.”*

Taxation without representation! That was the battle cry of the 13 colonies in America who were forced to pay taxes to England’s King George III with no representation in Parliament. As dissatisfaction grew, British troops were sent in to quell any signs of rebellion, and repeated attempts by the colonists to resolve the crisis without war proved fruitless.

On June 11, 1776, the colonies’ Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, formed a committee with the express purpose of drafting a document that would formally sever their ties with Great Britain. The committee included Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman and Robert R. Livingston. The document that we know as the Declaration of Independence was officially adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776.



Of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence...



...five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war. Several died in poverty, their resources used for or lost in the war.

All for freedom...

Knowing that our founding fathers were willing to sacrifice their lives for freedom from English rule, let us be willing to do so much more in gratitude for the freedom we have been given...



...let us be willing to do more to help others experience that freedom...freedom from sin, from bondage...



...let us be willing to constantly pray about our giving to God's church, that there may be ministries that reach out beyond our walls, that countless lives, both locally and around our world, might be impacted through missions...that others may discover the freedom that is only found in Jesus Christ...

