

Sunday, October 23
9:00am | 11:00am

Collection
or
Offering?



Sermon for Sunday, October 23, 2022
“Collection or Offering?” | 20th Sunday after Pentecost
Clara Thompson | Deuteronomy 12:5-7, Mark 12:38-44

Early in my ministry, I didn't like Stewardship Sundays at church. I thought stewardship was about money and asking people for money. Okay, that's part of it and by now you should have received your stewardship mailing from Covenant. I hope you have taken time to look it over and are in the process of prayerfully considering what your financial commitment to the church can be in the coming year, and I hope you'll return your Commitment Card next Sunday. But stewardship is so much more than filling out a financial Commitment Card. There is a Serving Survey that you can fill out online or contact the church office for a paper copy. The Serving Survey gives you the opportunity to let us know what particular ministries at Covenant you would be most interested in getting involved in, what ways you can share your time and your talents as you seek to serve God through this congregation. But again, stewardship is so much more than filling out a Commitment Card and a Serving Survey. Stewardship at its core is about **gratitude**. It's about being **grateful** for all the blessings we receive, and responding with an *offering* of our treasure, our time and talents, an *offering* of ourselves.

Both of our Scripture readings for this morning speak of the importance of our offerings, first from the book of Deuteronomy and then from the Gospel of Mark. In Deuteronomy, Moses has just given instructions to the people of Israel that they are not to worship God as the pagans do. And then Moses says,

“But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there. You shall go there, bringing there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, your votive gifts, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your

God, you and your households together, rejoicing in all the undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you.” (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus challenges us not to make a show of our gifts, but to offer humbly our gifts to God as gifts of the heart.

“As (Jesus) taught, he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’

(Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’” (Mark 12:38-44)

Stewardship is about being grateful for all the blessings we receive, and responding with an *offering* to our God, an offering of our treasure, our time and talents, an offering of our hearts and souls, an offering of ourselves. It’s not a collection. God does not *collect* taxes in order to pay for the work of the Lord around the world. There are neither *dues* nor *annual fees* attached to church membership or participation. So far as I know there is no *admission fee* per se in order to enter the Pearly Gates of Heaven. Whether or not we make a financial commitment to the church, we are each an important and critical part of God’s family, and an important part of this congregation as well. And yet, God does ask **something** of us. Not in the form of dues or a *collection*, but in the form of an *offering*, an *offering* of ourselves.

Here at Covenant, we talk a lot about learning God’s love and living God’s love. We talk about the *offering* of our lives, of the importance of our daily living as followers of Jesus Christ, as the most important *offering* we make. What we DO makes a difference. We *offer* our lives to God in order to make a positive difference in God’s world. The way we live our lives matters. The ways we use our money matters. During the season of stewardship, we talk about *offering* to God all that we have

and all that we are, trusting God to help us make good choices about how to use them. Let me say it again: God does not collect taxes. On our Commitment Cards we will not be stating what we'll put in the *collection*, as if it were some sort of an admission fee, but rather, what we will lovingly and gratefully *offer* as our gift to God and to Christ's church; what we offer in response to God's great love for us. You see, a *collection* is something we owe. An *offering* is something we freely give. The government *collects* taxes. When we go to a movie or a football game, there is always someone there to *collect* the required fee, or to receive the required ticket that we have already paid for in advance. It is a set amount, and if you pay, you get to go in. If you don't pay, you stay out. When we go out to eat, our waitstaff will give us a bill before we leave the table, stating what we OWE for the meal we have been served, and there will be someone at the cash register waiting to *collect* our money. If we buy something on credit and do not pay our bill, a *collection agency* will be in touch with us so that we will pay what we OWE. A *collection* is something we owe, and it is a specific amount and, usually, we do not have any control over what that amount is. An *offering*, on the other hand, is what we freely and gratefully give. An *offering* is a gift from the heart and soul.

God does not collect taxes. That is NOT what faithful stewardship and making a commitment to the church are all about. God says to the people of Israel,

“Seek the place that the Lord your God will choose ... go there, bringing there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, your votive candles, your freewill offerings” (Deut. 12:5-6).

An offering is when we freely give ourselves, or part of ourselves, or a token of ourselves. An offering is a gift. It is given in love to the One we love. It is offered as a thank-gift, as the poor widow put in her two copper coins, offered as a thank-gift with a grateful heart for all that has been given to us. Just as you or I may give a gift to a loved one or friend, a tangible item perhaps that can be wrapped with ribbon and bow, and that brings joy to our hearts in the giving, so it ought to be with our stewardship offerings to God. One of the changes that most of us make as we move from childhood to adulthood is that sometimes gradual transition from anxiously waiting to see what we GET for Christmas, to the blessed time when we can enjoy what we are able to GIVE for Christmas. It is when we realize for ourselves that it truly is better to give than it is to receive. It is giving a gift from our heart that is so much finer than receiving one, for it is in giving a treasure, that our heart is filled.

Why do we offer our gifts to God through the church? We've talked this month about how we live matters, that money matters, that church matters. My friends, the WHY matters also! We give because God has so richly blessed us, and we have a *spiritual* need to give our thanks in return. We offer our love-gifts trusting that God's love and Word will continue to spread in this community and beyond. We give to the church because we are members of a family, the family of God around the world. And members of a family simply do not let other family members suffer when they have the means to relieve the suffering. Our mission dollars are among the most important dollars that we as a church can spend. Our mission giving helps people in our own backyard and in our own community, and throughout the world, as people are fed, and clothed, and housed, and educated, and as their medical and physical needs are supplied.

You and I have received so much from our Creator God. All we need do is look around us and look within us. I don't need to count your blessings for you... you can certainly do that for yourself, and I hope you do... often! I actually like stewardship time at church, because it causes me to stop and think about all that I have in life... a family who loves me in spite of myself, a church community in which I can learn and grow and praise the Lord, church friends whom I can count on when I have a problem or are in need of prayer, a safe place to raise our children. The list is endless. And during stewardship time I take the time to really think about my blessings, to count them one by one, and the list goes on and on and on and on.

Faithfully responding at stewardship time is a spiritual act, an offering of love. If God wanted to collect taxes, I guess we'd each be given a bill. But God doesn't do that, because no one could possibly put a price tag on what God has done for us. No dollar amount could be determined. Instead, God gives the gift first ... a church home, a family, a community, salvation in Jesus Christ. The biggest offering ever made was that which God made: God's own Son, on the cross. My offering can't compare to that, and God never asks that it does. But as my heart fills with thanks, I am called to look within and see what I can do in response. For me, making a financial commitment to the church and filling out a Serving Survey are spiritual acts, not economic ones. I pray that they be so for you as well.

Amen.