

Giving our All

All Saints C | Ephesians 1; Luke 6

This morning is our celebration Sunday for our Stewardship emphasis.

This morning is also All Saints Sunday.

What possible connection could there be between these two things?

What does my giving back to God through Hope have to do with being a 'saint?'

If our mental picture of a saint is of a wizened, pillar of faith who died a horrible death rather than renounce their faith, then we'd be right to think there isn't much of a connection.

If we think a saint is only someone who is able to live as Jesus tells us in our gospel reading today, then we'd be right to think there isn't much of a connection.

After all, who can honestly do the things he tells us to do? Did you hear what Jesus said this morning:

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

Yikes! But that was the easy part. He went on to say:

*If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
and from anyone who takes away your coat
do not withhold even your shirt.
Give to everyone who begs from you;
and if anyone takes away your goods,
do not ask for them again.
Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

Luke 6:27-31

I look at my life, and then I look at the kind of life Jesus tells me to live, there's no comparison.

But I don't think being a saint

is only about long dead heroes and heroines of the faith, or about being someone who lives a perfect life.

'Saints' in the New Testament are the ordinary, garden variety believers who make up the community of faith in that time and place.

Often, the apostle Paul writes his letter "to the saints" at such and such a place.

You and I, then, are the saints of today in this place called Hope Lutheran Church. That's why we listed as saints in the bulletin both

those who have died in faith as well as
those who have recently begun their faith journey with their baptism.
We'll welcome another batch of saints in a few minutes
as new members and partners with us in ministry.

We're all saints, then, but **NOT** because of how much we give!
We are made saints by virtue of our baptism.
The seal of the promised Holy Spirit
Paul mentions in his letter to the Ephesians.
In the water and the word spoken to us,
God claims us and cleanses us from all sin.
When we are baptized God says that we will be God's children
and that God will be our God. Forever.

Our faith journey is filled with opportunities that test this relationship.
From the time we are teenagers onward,
we are confronted almost daily
with having to choose who or what will have first place in our lives.
That's the meaning of the First Commandment –
you shall have no other Gods.
We may not worship other idols in the form of statues or images
as they might have in the Old Testament.
But we are tempted to put
other things and/or people first in our life ahead of God.
Might be our family. Might be our job.
Might be our self. Might be money or our possessions.
Might even be our health.

At that place where our spirituality and our daily priorities collide –
that's where we find the connection between being a 'saint' and
our understanding of being a steward (or manager)
of what God gives us.

Being a saint isn't about being perfect.
Being a steward isn't just about giving
10% of our income to the ministry here.
Both are about what our priorities are,
and living in a way that reflects those priorities honestly.

If we say we believe in God
but act in a mean or unhealthy way with others,
there's an obvious contradiction here.

If we say that it's important to nurture our faith with God
by worshiping regularly,
but only attend on Christmas and Easter,
or stop coming all together because of

a change in worship service style or schedule,
there's an obvious contradiction here.

If we say we put God first in our lives,
but then spend all our time and energy and finances
satisfying ourselves and our own pleasure,
there's an obvious contradiction here.

How are we saints to live out our faith
and our priorities as we manage what God gives us?

Through the prophet Malachi, God tells us,

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse,
so that there may be food in my house.*

3:10

A "tithe" is a tenth (or a 'tithe') of what God gives us.
It represents the essential response
God expects from us as Christ followers,
and it should be given back to God through the church we attend.
God says, "Bring the *full* tithe into the storehouse,"
not just part of it.

The obedient Israelite didn't ask
whether he could give 7 percent, or
whether she could tithe on the 'net' rather than the 'gross.'
Whatever God provided, 10 percent belonged to God.

In the book of Proverbs, we hear,

*Honor the Lord with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops.*

3.9

The giving of firstfruits made an important statement.
By this, we are saying (in effect):
"We give of our first and best to you, Lord,
because we recognize all good things come from you.
In doing this, we recognize our responsibility
to sustain the spiritual leadership and ministry you provide for us."

Tithe denotes the amount of the offering,
firstfruits the nature of the offering.
The firstfruits offering reminds us of God's ownership;
that God is the source of all life and blessing.
It also says "We trust you, God, to help us harvest the rest."

One day, Jesus was sitting across
from the offering box in the Temple.

He was observing how the crowd
tossed money in for the collection.
Many of the rich were making large contributions.
One poor widow came up and put in two small coins –
a measly two cents.
Jesus called his disciples over and said,

*The truth is that this poor widow
gave more to the collection
than all the others put together.
All the others gave what they'll never miss;
she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford –
she gave her all.*

Mark 12.41-44 (The Message)

That's what saints do –
we give our all by living lives that put God first.
We see ourselves and our gifts and our resources
as the way God shows compassion for the world.
That doesn't mean we're always perfect,
or that we always make the right choices.
But as saints, you and I know in what direction we are heading.
When we fall down, God is there to pick us up;
to dust us off and to help us refocus on the path we have chosen.

Amen