

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, WI
October 13, 2019

10 for 10 Series

Consider Carefully Your Ways

- 1. The Lazy Way**
- 2. The Proportionate Way**
- 3. A Time for Decision**

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ “‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The message begins with a video from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety:

<https://youtu.be/xdX6J5KQXS0>,

That seems out of place doesn't it? That's the wrong message!

That's the way it seemed to me when I thought about the context of Jesus' stern warning: "You wicked, lazy servant!" That's not the kind, ding-ding-ding warning that you are straying from your lane. That's Jesus laying on the horn. You are in the wrong lane!

That seems so out of place! Jesus isn't talking with his enemies here. There aren't any Pharisees in the crowd. No one that others might label "sinner!" This is Tuesday of Holy Week. He had preached in the temple courts earlier that day. He had foretold that this beautiful temple would be destroyed.

Later, as he is settling down for the evening on the Mount of Olives, his disciples, his faithful followers, gather around him and ask a question. When will this beautiful temple be destroyed? When will the end of the world come?

Matthew 24 records the signs that Jesus gave about the end of the world. In that same conversation Jesus tells three parables in Matthew 25 about the end of the world. Our text is the middle of those parables.

So here he is among his friends, and he lays on the horn. Look out. You are drifting into the wrong lane! "You wicked, lazy servant."

Did Jesus make a mistake? Or is Jesus like a driver in the car behind you, seeing another car in your blind spot and laying on the horn to warn you of the danger?

What did Jesus see that the disciples couldn't see? What does he see that we can't see? What is in our blind spot?

The apostles are safely sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. They are the "in" crowd. They "get it." They are "safe."

But what does Jesus know about them? He knows what will happen just two days later just down the hill in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knows the power of the sinful nature even in these dear friends of his, a power that would lead them to run in fear in the garden and deny him publicly.

As life would go on, that same powerful sinful nature would tempt them to become that wicked, lazy servant. They had been entrusted with much. But eventually they would grow tired. They would be tempted to give God their second best, the second best of their efforts, the second best of their energy, the second best of their time, and the second best of their offerings.

What Jesus saw clearly is the danger of drift. That we easily drift into that lane of second best, the lazy lane of Christian living. What is the least I can do? Where can I cut corners?

What was true of the disciples is certainly also true of us. It hurts to say it, but I need to hear Jesus lay on the horn. "Pete! Look out! You are in danger of drifting!" Don't we all need to hear that warning?

Jesus saw what was in the disciples' blind spot about themselves. Jesus also reveals that we can have a blind spot about our Master.

Notice what that wicked, lazy servant says about the master: "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground."

What was the blind spot? The servant forgot the Master's kindness and love. The servant forgot the Master knew his skills and abilities and gave him an opportunity to serve in a way that fit those skills and abilities. All the servant saw was the master's justice and didn't understand the ultimate goal was love.

Could there be that blind spot in our Christian walk? Could it be that we act out of a sense of duty and guilt rather than love and joy? Last week I mentioned that defilement transfers. If we act out of a defiled, sinful heart, it defiles everything that we do. When we become bitter that God is asking too much of us, that God somehow isn't fair, that it all depends on us, that we are going to fail, so why even try... all of those reveal blind spots about our Master. Jesus is laying on the horn, warning that we are drifting out of our lane into the "wicked, lazy servant" lane.

Last week, when I was driving in downtown Milwaukee, someone laid on the horn. I was drifting into their lane. Honk!!! If that driver was anything like me, his or her emotion was anger.

Is that Jesus' motive in laying on the horn in this parable? Is he angry with the disciples? Is he angry with us?

Remember the setting. This is Tuesday of Holy Week. Three days from this moment, Jesus will be placed into a tomb. The flogging, the nails, the agony and death will have already been complete. Jesus knew what lay ahead. He didn't do that for his disciples because he was angry with them. He was about to demonstrate his love for them, and for us.

The Savior's words sound harsh to us because we are so precious to him and he wants nothing to separate us from himself. The warning sound is the sound of love.

In love he sounds the warning, and in love he gives an opportunity to serve him.

In the parable he entrusts his riches to his servants, each according to his ability. What an honor he is bestowing on these servants! What an honor he is bestowing on us!

Isn't that a different way of looking at our possessions? They are God's possessions that he is entrusting to us. Isn't that a different way of looking also at the challenges that you face in your family or at work? The God, who knows us perfectly, entrusts us with this opportunity to serve him.

Isn't that a surprising commitment from our Savior? He knows in advance how we will fail. He knows in advance the setbacks. But he also knows the abilities he has given us and the strength he provides... and the good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

What an encouragement that is! Your master has entrusted great riches into your hands and he knows you will be able to use them wisely.

There is a surprising commitment in us too! The servants, each according to their ability, serve their master. They aren't forced. They see it as a trust and they want to do well for their master. Could it be that they know their master's love?

One of the privileges that we as full-time workers in the church have is to see how God's people put what God has entrusted them to work.

Over the last few weeks, I've been amazed at a young man named Alex. It seems like he is living here as he works to update some of our musical equipment.

I'm amazed at the commitment of our reading buddies. I think Seth mentioned that there were 29 reading buddies ready to serve our children this past week.

A few weeks ago I walked into the Trinity Gym to see the book fair. All of it was members serving their Savior. Countless hours given. And when I walked in, I saw the smiles of joy in that service.

Over and over again, I get to see and hear our Master's servants say, "Here are the five talents that you have given me. I have put them to work and gained five more."

When people know their Master as the Savior who loves them unconditionally, their commitment to him is surprising.

And what a joy it is to hear the surprising equality in our Master's praise. Both the servant who was entrusted with five talents who gained five more and the servant entrusted with two talents who gained two more heard the exact same word of praise: "Well done, good and faithful servant... Come and share your master's happiness."

This is a powerful lesson in proportionate giving. Recently I was privileged to visit with a WELS member who is not a member of our congregation as he talked about his proportionate gifts. He chose to include in his giving plan our proposal for a second site--\$50,000 over the next 18 months! "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I also have the privilege of seeing when individuals begin giving offerings here at St. Paul's. \$5 from a recent confirmand. \$20 from another. Each gave in proportion to the Lord's blessings to them. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

As we continue our 10 for 10 focus, this is the question. What is the proportionate response for me?

In the Old Testament, God treated his people like minor children. He told them exactly what they were to do:

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the LORD (Leviticus 27:30, 32).

He even accused them of robbing him if they gave less than 10%.

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. ⁹You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. ¹⁰Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (Malachi 3:8-10).

Notice how he encouraged them to be faithful in giving that 10% with a wonderful promise!

I say that God treated them like minor children based on what the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:23-25; 4:1-7:

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ² The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³ So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces[b] of the world. ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.[c] ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba,[d] Father.” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

The people of the Old Testament were like me as a child. I got a quarter twenty minutes before church. My job was to hold on to it until the offering and put the quarter in the offering. No decisions on my part. My father entrusted a small amount to me to give to the Lord.

Now we in the New Testament are like adult children. We aren’t told to give the tithe or 10%. Instead we hear these words:

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income (1 Corinthians 16:2).

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Now we are being treated like adults. What is that proportion that is “in keeping with our income”?

Do you hear the horn? Are we drifting into the lazy lane rather than a proportionate response? If God commanded his little children to give 10%, why would we expect him to look for less from us, his adult children?

In the lobby is a 10 for 10 plan for giving card for you. I ask you to take it home and put it someplace where you see it the next couple of weeks. We are inviting you to take this time to consider carefully your ways. Do our offerings indicate that we are taking the “lazy” lane? We invite you to consider giving at that 10% level, trusting that the God who promised to bless his Old Testament people can also bless us. If 10% seems beyond you right now, what amount would be a spiritually mature response to the way God has blessed you. Perhaps you are already at 10%. Is that the right response for you right now? Is it possible that the Savior has entrusted you with the financial means and the spiritual strength to go beyond that percentage? Perhaps you are at the stage in life where your needs have diminished but your financial means remain high. Perhaps in your situation, 10% is still the “lazy lane,” not nearly enough to be a faithful manager of what God has entrusted to you.

Complete the plan for giving and try to give at that level for the next 10 weeks to the end of the year.

What a blessing it will be when our master calls us to account, and we can celebrate together with him his incredible love for us, that even though he knew our weaknesses and sins, he loved us, forgave us, and then entrusted us with resources to be used in his service. We can hear the Savior say, “Well done, good and faithful servant... Come and share your master’s happiness.” Amen.

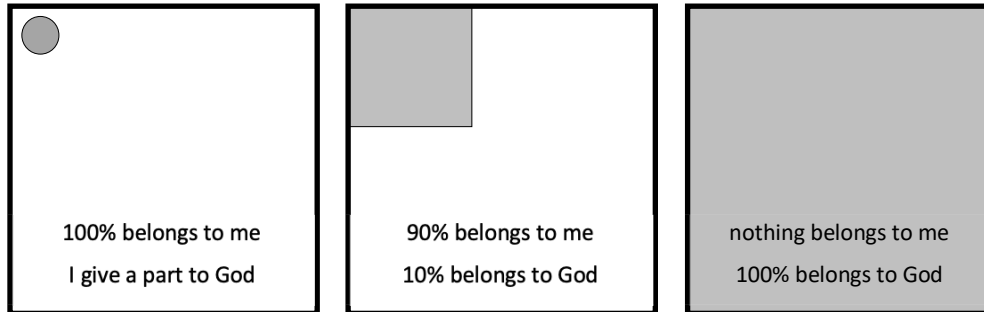
prepared by Pastor Peter Panitzke
ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org
414-422-0320, ext. 122

My Next Steps

- **Read Malachi 3:8-11.** God invites us to test him. Does your offering as a proportion of your income test God in this way?
- **Read 2 Corinthians 8 – 9.** Highlight phrases that help you consider your offering as a significant proportion of your income.

GroupWork

1. Where have you seen Jesus active in your life this past week?
2. Look at diagram below. Which box accurately reflects the truth of Psalm 24:1? How could this diagram help you explain proportionate giving to a new Christian?



3. Read Leviticus 27:30-34.
 - a. In what way(s) would it have been harder for God's people 3500 years ago to give 10% than for us to give 10%?
 - b. In what way(s) would it have been easier for God's people 3500 years ago to give 10% than for us to give 10%?
4. Read Malachi 3:8-11. Do you think God's call to test him in regard to giving a tithe still applies today? Why or why not?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. What can you learn about proportionate giving from the following verses?
 - a. Verse 2
 - b. Verse 3
 - c. Verse 5
 - d. Verse 7
 - e. Verse 12
6. What gives you joy as you give your offerings to the Lord?