Offering Words: Firstfruits (Exodus 23.16; Proverbs 3.9)

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Dominant Thought: We trust God by honoring Him first.

Objectives:

I want my listeners to understand the firstfruits offering recognizes God's greatness and points to more to come.

I want my listeners to feel confident in the gifts God provides.

I want my listeners to show our trust in God by honoring Him first in our choices.

We trust God by honoring Him first. That's a nice sentiment, but hard to live out at times. If we are not careful, life and distractions and responsibilities can crowd out our relationship with God.

If you love God, then you will honor Him first above all else. In the Hebrew Bible, we encounter a festival at harvest time that commands people to bring the first of their harvest. It was called firstfruits. It was the first part of the harvest with a promise that more would follow.

The instructions for the firstfruits offering teach us three lessons.

First, the firstfruits offering responds to the freedom God gives (Exodus 23.14-19).

As we read through these laws in the Old Testament, it is important to understand the story of these laws. It is better to understand these laws or rules as instructions. They are instructions or rules for the relationship. Every relationship has expectations: tell the truth, be faithful, be kind...

The children of Israel had only known life as an enslaved people in Egypt. Their entire life was scripted with labor and no rest and no freedom. In the context of these rules in Exodus 23, we read about the instructions for three festivals. One of them remembers, "that month you came out of Egypt" (Ex. 23.15). It is in the context of freedom that we

celebrate these festivals. They are no longer enslaved. They have left their captors back in Egypt and were journeying to the Promised Land. The children were called to celebrate. They were instructed not to appear before the LORD empty handed (Exodus 23.15).

Then, in Exodus 23.16, "Celebrate the Festival of the Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field." You return the first portion to God who has generously given you a crop and provided for your freedom.

I recently visited the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, IL. On display was a model of a "Sculpture of Lincoln with Cape, Pen and Emancipation Proclamation." The caption with the display reads, "This statue of Lincoln with pen and the Emancipation Proclamation reveals that his image as "The Great Emancipator" was cemented after his death. Freed people often kept an image of the president in their homes and named their schools after him. Black people were also the first to raise money to build his statue, like the formerly enslaved woman Charlotte Scott, who donated the first five dollars she earned in freedom for a Lincoln memorial."

My friends, while we haven't experienced bondage in Egypt. We have been set free from our sins in Jesus Christ. The firstfruits offering reminds us of the freedom we have in Christ.

There is a second lesson the firstfruits offering teaches us.

Second, the firstfruits offering reflects our trust in God's care (Proverbs 3.5-10).

Many people may recognize Proverbs 3.5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Only a couple verses after we are commanded to trust in the LORD and submit to Him in all our ways, then comes the command, "Honor the LORD with your wealth" (Proverbs 3.9). The writer further describes how to honor God with your wealth, "with the firstfruits of all your crops."

Some people will take advantage of these verses and claim them as a prosperity teaching. Give to God and you will be wealthy. After all, the next verse says, "then your barns will be overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine" (Proverbs 3.10). The Proverbs are general

observations of life but not promises. It could be saying, trust God first with all He has given you and He will provide for your needs.

My favorite verse is Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Put God first and He will take care of your needs: food and clothing are mentioned earlier in Matthew 6.

Honoring the LORD with the firstfruits requires faith. What happens if the rest of the crop is not so good? The firstfruits offering reflects our trust in God’s care. We give because we trust God. We give because He is generous. We give because all we have is a gift from Him. We give because we believe He will take care of our needs.

According to a recent survey, “The Ultimate List Of Charitable Giving Statistics For 2026”, “Christians are giving at 2.5% of income; during the Great Depression it was 3.3%”
(source: https://nonprofitssource.com/online-giving-statistics/). We have more material resources today and give a less percentage than during the Great Depression.

Ray Maduena, our ministry intern, and I attended a mass at Blessed Sacrament in Springfield, IL on November 2, 2026. As we were admiring the marble columns, the artwork, and the stained glass, one of their members caught our attention. She shared with us an informational pamphlet on the church history and how the architecture tells the gospel story. She went on to say the church building was built during the Great Depression. She said the members of the church essentially took out a second mortgage on their homes to provide the funds for the church building.

I wonder what testimonies the people of Blessed Sacrament could tell of God’s provision. What are some of the ways God has provided for you and your family? The firstfruits offering displays our trust in God’s care of us.

Third, the firstfruits offering points to a promise God makes (Romans 8.22-25; 1 Corinthians 15.20-26; James 1.16-18).

As we turn the page to the New Testament, we have a few examples of the firstfruits in describing the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and us.

In Romans 8.22-25, Paul writes, “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” Remember the firstfruits offering was the first gift. In giving the firstfruits, people were saying, “There’s more to come.” This is my first gift and best gift, but I will give more later.

Paul shares in Romans 8, Christians have the Holy Spirit as a first and best gift of a better life to come. Creation is groaning. We wait for the redemption of our bodies. The Holy Spirit as the firstfruit tells us better things are coming—new bodies and hope that brings salvation. A hope we wait for patiently.

The Apostle Paul continues by connecting the firstfruits to Christ raising from the dead in 1 Corinthians 15.20-26. In 1 Corinthians 15.20, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of all who have fallen asleep.” The resurrection of Christ promises a future resurrection for other Christians. In 1 Corinthians 15.22-23, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.” In a way, Easter Sunday is a firstfruits reminder. Christ defeated death first. Then, all who are with Christ will share in that victory. Paul goes on to say, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15.26). The firstfruits offering points to the future hope we have in Christ. Death does not have the final word.

The firstfruits point to the Holy Spirit living in Christians with the hope of new bodies. The firstfruits point to Jesus as the first who overcame the grave and will raise us with Him. The firstfruits also describe followers of Jesus.

In James 1.16-18, James, the half-brother of Jesus, commands Christians, “Do not be deceived...” Then, he declares, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows.” Every good and perfect gift is from above—from our heavenly Father. Soak in that truth today.

Then, James writes, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he has created” (James 1.18). God chose to give you life. We are created in His image. We are kind of a firstfruits of all he has created. He gave us birth through the word of truth—the gospel. You become a new person. You are born again when you accept God’s gift of salvation. There’s still more to come for the

followers of Jesus. God wants us to surrender our lives completely to Him. He's rescued us from slavery to sin. He provides for our needs; therefore we can trust Him. He promises a future hope for us in Christ Jesus.

Selina Hastings understood what it was like to become a new person through the word of truth. Selina Hastings, countess of Huntingdon, England (1707-1791), became a wealthy widow at the age of 29. A follower of Jesus, she dedicated her fortune and the rest of her life to the advancement of the gospel, writing, "The one thing worth living for must be proclaiming the love of God to man in Jesus Christ" (Matt Proctor, "The Countess and the Converted Actor" *the ambassador,* Summer 2026, p. 10). In Matt Proctor's article, he went on to say of the countess, "She gave support and encouragement to preachers John and Charles Wesley, hymn writer Isaac Watts, composer George Handel (known for his famous "Messiah" oratorio), and preacher John Newton, who wrote "Amazing Grace" and aided William Wilberforce in ending the British slave trade. She became a major support of George Whitefield who preached over 18,000 sermons to an estimated 10 million people during the Great Awakening."

Our action step this week is to answer the following question, **"How will you honor God first this week?"** What if you prioritize time in Scripture and prayer at the start of your day? What if you look at your budget and see if God is first in your finances? What if you see God's wisdom first in the decision you need to make? What if you remind yourself, "I have hope in Jesus that life will get better"?