

Good Morning,

Over the last couple of weeks, Janet and Pennie have talked to us about how we are called to be givers of our time and our talent. Today, I want to talk to you about the importance of being prayerful givers of our treasure.

To begin, we need to ask the question– why? Why do we talk about the personal and uncomfortable topic of giving treasure in church? It is because we are called by God to be cheerful givers.

II Corinthians 9:6-7 says:

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

We are called by God to give of our time, talent and treasure, and to do so cheerfully!

Secondly, this topic comes up specifically at this time of year because it starts a conversation that comes from necessity. It is at this time that the finance committee sits down and begins to draft a budget for the upcoming year. In order to draft that budget, we have to know the collective result of your prayerful conversations with God in order to know what direction we need to move in with regard to that budget.

My goal today is not to stand up here and tell anyone or guilt anyone into giving ANYTHING but rather to encourage you to have a conversation with God. To prayerfully discern how God is calling you to be cheerful givers of your treasure.

Malachi 3:10 says “Bring full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” – God tells us to test him. This is the only time God doesn’t just instruct us to have faith in Him. Let me ask you this - have you EVER heard someone say “giving has wrought havoc on my life?” I haven’t! I HAVE heard testimony that in response to the giving of treasure, God gives abundantly to His people. I personally have experienced God’s abundance and I’m proud to share my testimony with you today.

Let me back up...Sabrina and I were born and raised Catholics, converting to the Episcopal Church in 2011 when we started coming to Messiah. We sat in the pew our whole lives hearing that we should be more giving of our treasure. As adults and only through much prayer, time and trust we began to listen to God on this. We always knew that as Christians we are called to be generous givers. Tithers in fact. I can tell you though, I never quite knew how to get there.

Early on, giving meant \$5 or \$10 in the offering plate each week. We never formally committed to a pledge but we made sure that if we were in the pew, our offering was in the plate. Shortly after we began our walk here at Messiah, sitting right here in the pew listening to a talk about stewardship, we began to hear God speaking to us. So, over the next few years, God continued to work in both Sabrina and I. Pushing us to first pledge annually then pushing to give more and more each year. We continued to increase our giving, but God kept pushing, now placing the word “sacrificial” on our hearts. I remember the first year we completed our pledge card “sacrificially.” I remember feeling a pit in my stomach as the pledge went into the plate. That pit was immediately followed by the words of Malachi. So I embraced that call to “test Him”. A few times that year, God made it apparent that He

would keep his word. I remember one instance where my paycheck was a few days away, the bank account was completely empty and I needed gas in the car. I had no idea where I was going to find the money. God did! You see, it had grown cold and so I dug out an old jacket and on the way out the door, I stuck my hand in my pocket only to discover a \$20 bill. Just enough to get us to my next paycheck. God never gave up on his promise to bless us abundantly and He would go on to show His blessings a number of times.

In November 2017- God put a new word on our heart. Tithe... Now I have to tell you. This terrified me. In fact, I fought God on this one. But He continued to work in us and eventually, we cheerfully obeyed knowing we trusted in Him. In February 2018 the unimaginable happened, Sabrina had taken a year-long leave of absence from teaching and I lost my job. We were devastated! Once again and without fail, God never broke His promise, even when we went from having plenty to having nothing, He continued to provide. Over the next few months, we saw God working in everything in our lives but especially in our finances. He sustained us from December to August when I finally found a new job. Looking back, apart from the grace of God, there is no possible way we could have survived.

My friends- I tell you this story to say- Test Him! You will be pleasantly surprised every time!

In closing- I encourage each and every one of you to prayerfully discern how God is calling you to be cheerful givers of your treasure.

Let us pray- Heavenly Father. It is through you that all things are provided. Thank you for your promise to bless us abundantly when we bring a full tithe into the storehouse. I pray that you continue to work in ways that go beyond all understanding so that your name be glorified. In Jesus' most holy name- AMEN.