



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

2 Poland Manor
Poland, Ohio 44514
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27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 5, 2014

Chronicles 31:2-10, 20-21

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

“First Fruits”

If you are a gardener then you know all about the first fruits. They are the ones that come before the insects, drought, overwatering, or any other kinds of pestilence has been able to do its work on the plant. First fruits are the most flavorful, the prettiest, the most perfect. How many of you use olive oil in cooking today? What kind do you buy? Do you get the Extra Virgin Olive oil or the cheaper kind? The Extra Virgin Olive Oil comes from the first pressing – it is the purest – the first fruit.

My mother grew up in the depression years and as a little girl she said she never had a dress that had not been worn by someone else – she only had hand me downs. A new dress that no one has ever worn is like a first fruit. Hand me downs might be clean and in good repair and left overs might taste good, but really, the freshness of food that has just been prepared is always more appealing. Who wants left overs all the time?

It is just a fact of life that first fruits are more desirable. So if we want first fruits, don't you think God does too? If we are going to give our gifts to God, do we really want to give him our left overs? Whether it is time or talent or treasure, what we give to God by giving to the Church should be the best of what we have, not the least. It should come right off the top. If it is our pledge, then that should be the first check written each month, not the last. In our reading from Chronicles we hear a story about how the people of God did just that – gave the best of what they had, but the story has a little more to it just this.

If we go back a few chapters we find that the house of the Lord was in crisis. After a series of unfaithful leaders, the temple was a mess. The previous leadership had not paid attention to the house of the Lord or to the people of the Lord and things had fallen into disrepair. The priests had not received tithes and so they weren't doing their job. But Hezekiah was a good king, coming into power after a

series of bad kings, and the first thing that he did was recognize the importance of God in the life of the people and that centered around the Temple worship. The first thing Hezekiah did was to open the doors of the house of the Lord and repair them. There is a lot of symbolism in that act. If the doors cannot be opened, the people cannot hear the word of God, they cannot offer their sacrifices, their offerings, their worship.

Then he called the Levites, the priests, and told them to clean themselves up and clean up the temple – In the 29th chapter this is what Hezekiah says: “Hear me, levites! Now Sanctify yourselves and sanctify the House of the Lord, the God of your Fathers, and carry out the filth from the holy place. For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs. They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.” So the Levites got it together. They sanctified themselves and for sixteen days they cleaned things up. Then they came to Hezekiah and told him, everything is ready. Now you can bring your offerings. Now you can begin to worship God with instruments and praises and songs of gladness. And everyone came out and there was great joy and celebration.

And Hezekiah told the people – this is what the Lord requires of you – you have to take care of these priests so that they can encourage you in the keeping of the law– you have to take care of the temple so that you have a pure place in which to worship– you have to take care of the needs of the poor to do justice as the Lord requires.

And the people did. They gave. They gave abundantly – they gave cheerfully, they gave the first fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey and all that they grew – they gave of their oxen and sheep and it was laid up before God in Heaps! Heaps!

And Hezekiah asked the priests if they had what they needed to do their work. And they told Hezekiah that “since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have plenty left: for the Lord has blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.” They had enough. And the work that Hezekiah began, the work he did among the people, was good and right and true and in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

There is no end to what God can do among the people when the people turn to God with their whole heart and soul and mind. There is no end to what God can do with our gifts when we give abundantly, cheerfully, of our first fruits – and

what will happen is not that we will suffer from want, but that we will have enough. And the people we serve will have enough, and the church will have enough. But it all begins here – in our hearts – to realize as the people in Hezekiah's time realized, that they had been called to give to God the first fruits of all that had been entrusted to them.

Let us pray: Lord, we know that we have not been faithful in providing from our abundance for the needs of our church. Heal our unfaithfulness and turn our hearts to see that giving does not diminish what we have, but enriches us and others more than we could ever imagine. Amen