



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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October 12, 2014
Stewardship Sunday

Genesis 14:17-20

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgiJS4ZWm64>

What is this thing about tithing all about? Where did it come from in the first place?

Genesis 14:17-20

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

“Melchizedek, Prince of Peace”

I love this passage from Genesis. In fact, it might be my all time favorite scripture. So much do I love this that my dear friend, Jackie Solem, who writes icons, wrote this icon as a gift for my ordination. It took her over a year to write it and the icon tells visually the story of the priest and king – Melchizedek. He is one of the most overlooked and yet mysterious characters in the entire Bible. He comes from Salem which is the early name for Jerusalem and means peace. He is a King, so he is the Prince of Peace. He is a priest of God Most High. And there in the middle of a battlefield, he brings out bread and wine and feeds this Holy meal to all of these defeated kings who are gathered together. And then he blesses Abram. Melchizedek is a mysterious Old Testament appearance of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He seems to come out of nowhere and after the meal he is heard about no more, seeming to disappearing into nowhere – until the time to appear on earth once again would come.

In this story we hear the first mention of a tithe. Abram was indeed a blessed man. Over and over God delivered him from danger. Over and over God gave Abram increase

of grain and goats and sheep and even in his old age, two sons. Abram had a first hand encounter with Melchizedek, Abram saw God face to face, and shared a meal with him. Abram was a blessed man.

A blessed man or woman knows that their blessings do not come from their own efforts, but from God alone. A blessed man or woman must respond to that blessing. They must respond just as Abram did that day on the battlefield. Abram gave to this Holy King, a tenth of everything.

A tenth of everything is a good starting point. Why? Because it is in the Bible – and not only in this first mention in Genesis - but over twenty five times throughout the Old and New Testaments we are told to bring tithes, a tenth. This is something that is repeated over and over again so we should heed the words. We can't just ignore this because we don't like it or minimize it because it is not convenient. We need to know where to begin with our giving. 10% of what we have received is just that - a beginning. It is not by any means the end.

You know that just because you pledge 10% on your pledge card, you are still going to be asked to give for special things, like Crop Walk, and Peace and Justice, and Global Missions, and per capita, and Christmas Joy, just to mention a few things for which you will be asked for a contribution. And don't forget those letters that come to your home in the mail – for Breast Cancer awareness and Autism, Easter Seals, and hundreds of other good causes. And, of course, the kids who come to the door selling candy for the band. I mean, every time you turn around, someone is asking you for money. So start out with a 10% pledge to the church and figure that by the time you are finished your overall giving will probably be 15%. And that's OK, because, after the government gets finished taking their share, you will probably get to keep 55% for yourself and that is more than half. You get to KEEP more than half!!! :))

For most of us, today, 55% is enough. We have enough food to eat, enough clothing to wear, enough gas to put in our tanks, enough to pay our bills. Most of us. But not all of us. So if you don't have enough of all the things you really need, you can tune me out right now because I'm not talking to you. The interesting thing, though, is that in most mainline denominations you are the ones who will take this to heart and those who do have enough will think the message to tune out is for them. Those who earn less tend to give a greater percentage of their income and those who earn more tend to give a lesser percentage.

If you, like me, do have enough, you know that, like Abram, you are blessed. And being blessed requires a response. Let's just assume that we all start by giving 10% to our church. What would that look like? Well, let's make another assumption – on the low end, I think – but bear with me. Let's say that each of our 250 or more pledging families in this church have an average income of \$30,000 per year. If we all tithed, we would have \$750,000 per year available to do God's work here in this place. That is a pretty impressive number. If we had pledges of \$750,000 per year we would not have to worry about who was going to donate candles for Christmas Vespers or paper plates for the Harvest Moon dinner or snacks for the kids in Sunday School. Our sound system would

be top notch, we could buy items for our newcomer's baskets, and print color brochures like the ones now in the narthex.

But that would only be a dent in our pledge money. We could have two full time pastors to do the teaching, pastoral care, preaching, and administration work of this church that is so necessary. We could give our employees a few extra benefits, we could hire additional custodial staff, and fill that new position from Strategic Planning for a Communications Director. Errol could buy new music and have all the pianos tuned. But if we tithed here is the biggest thing we could do. Our mission giving – the dollars that actually go out into the world to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, and provide for those in need could increase by over 400%.

I know that there are those among us living on fixed incomes who are unable to give 10%, but if the rest of us – those of us who do have enough – stepped out in faith and committed to giving a full 10% of our yearly income - what an incredible place this would be. It works like this: You get a hundred, you give ten. It's that simple!