

**Message Delivered at Christ Church**  
**October 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009**  
**TEXT: Matthew 6:24-33**  
Delivered by Paul A. Johnson

\*\*\*\*\*

Today is a special day in our life together. Of course, every Sabbath is a special day; but some are more special than others. And sometimes they're special because they're special to all the faithful...like Easter and Christmas. And sometimes they're special because of what's going on in our nation...like Independence Day and Memorial Day. But sometimes, we got special days that are special only to us...like our birthday, or when we give Bibles to third graders like we did last week.

Today is one of *those* kinds of special and joyful days. Because today is the day we make our commitment to the work we're doing together for next year...we sing some; and pray some; and share at the table some; and sign up. It's a day of privilege...when we get to put it out there, and be counted for Christ, and commit to being kingdom bringers in a way that asks something of us and strengthens us at the same time; when we practice faith in a tangible manner, and exercise our trust muscles so that we're made more ready.

Because this is the day we offer our pledge cards for 2010...sign our cards, and offer them at the table as a sign of thanksgiving and commitment.

Our signed pledge cards indicate our financial support for our common work for next year. The card looks like this, and all of us should have one by now. On it, we make a promise. It's a promise we make to God, and a promise we make to one another. It's a promise to set aside a particular amount, to release it, and hand it over to the community for the sake of our common godly work.

Our common godly work is things like this:

- Greater support of the people of the Diocese of Virginia;
- Greater support of CARITAS; Comfort Zone; Micah; Rebuilding Richmond; Habitat; the creation of a Community Garden; the creation of a Memorial Garden; ministry with our friends in Sudan, Peru, Haiti, Downtown Richmond, and other places.
- Our common godly work is a ministry to children and youth—which is another way of saying teaching our young people that Jesus loves them; that adults other than their parents love them; and that the Church is their safe home for life.
- Our common godly work is our worship ministry—which is another way of saying that our promises make possible the music leadership that makes it so that we take such pleasure in singing, and the candles we light to symbolize our prayers, and the bulletins that make it so that we can all be present in the act of worshipping God.
- Our promises make possible staff people like Jimmy, and Jeff, and Ashley, and others who do all the clean-up work. We use our spaces a lot, and in lots of different ways, and that they are clean and orderly is because they're the ones who do it. It's an essential ministry of hospitality that we only notice when it doesn't happen.
- Our promises make possible the work done by Kathy; and Josie; and Jan; and Claudia; and all the other quiet administrative work that isn't always very flashy, but without which we would have no common life together at all.

- Our promises make possible the network of caring and support and encouragement that helps us through the difficult times; that makes it so that when something difficult in our life happens there's someone there to hold our hand and let us know it will all be okay.

That doesn't cover everything, but it covers a lot...

Our promises help us plan. That's one reason they matter for our life together.

But for ourselves, individually, these promises matter, as well. We ask one another to sign our names to these cards not because we make public what people promise. We don't. This is confidential, between us and God.

Instead, we sign our names to these cards so that we each have the opportunity to make a personal commitment; to make a decision, and to say "yes;" to jump in, and be part of this work, and make a promise to God and one another; and to hold our own selves accountable.

You see, we're a people that has always practiced commitment. We do it in lots of ways. We know that grace may be free, but it's not cheap. We know that the Lord sure does give the best to us, but also asks the best of us

We're a people that knows we exist by the grace and mercy of God, and that making our offering is a simple way of helping do God's work, paying it forward, and giving back to the one who has given us life and salvation. Time and time again we've said it...that the Lord is the Great Giver. From before the beginning God has been towards us with open arms, begging us to live the same way simply because it is a better way of living that makes life better. Today's a day we do that together, one more time. After all, we've been living this way for sixteen years. We've seen this truth of the Kingdom played out in our lives.

When it comes to a list of the most beautiful and comforting words from Jesus, these ones we heard tonight are right up there. They are a poetic vision of the Kingdom. They remind us to trust...just for today, to trust that the Lord is gracious and merciful, and abounds in steadfast love, as the psalmist says. To seek first the Kingdom Jesus gives us; to attach ourselves to that pillar so that all else in our lives may be in right order. To put first things first.

We do that when we worship together; and when we serve one another, and those beyond us; when we stop for a moment in the quiet of our own closet and say our prayers or read our Bible. It's also what we do as we support our common work with our tithes and offerings, and make our promises to God and one another. We got a job to help Jesus save the world; to be his inviting, growing, and living people.

Our hope today is that we will stretch together; and go large; and move a bit beyond what is comfortable.

If you are brand new to this community, there is no expectation that you make your commitment today. But a sure way to be invested in a community is to participate in this part of its life.

If you have never pledged before and are wondering how to start, our teaching is that a great place to begin is with 3% of one's income. We teach proportional giving here, and 3% is a great place to start. A study was done a while back that said that Americans, on average, can't account for 3% of their income. So dedicating to our common godly work the equivalent of what we don't keep track of is a good place to start.

We also teach the tithe here, which is 10%; off the top; before taxes; given gladly. We teach it because it's the guideline observed by the faithful for millennia. We also teach it because we all seek happiness, and we've never met an unhappy tither. Whether that relationship is causal or correlational, I don't know. It just seems to be true.

But if we're not there yet, that's okay. We just keep moving towards it, because we also teach that God smiles on every act of generosity and trust.

Here's how this process works today: In a moment, we're going to see some pictures that celebrate the life Jesus has given us; just some pictures that remind us that through the mercy of God, we are a people with a purpose. Afterwards, there'll be a time for us to complete our pledge cards and sign them if we haven't already done so. The ushers will then gather up the cards the same way we do the regular offering, and will present them to the table. It's an act of worship; part of our service to the Lord tonight. After that, we'll say our prayers; make our regular offering; and share at the table.

In this way, we will present our lives to the Lord; we'll give our hearts in a tangible way; make our promise; and be part of the Kingdom work Jesus has given us to do in a way that matters, and makes a real difference; a real difference...in the lives each of us live; a difference in our life together; and a difference in the life of the world we serve, and for which Jesus came.