

Commitment Sunday
Renew: To Everything There Is a Season

November 17, 2019

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Hebrews 12:1-2

Luke 21:1-4

1 Chronicles 29:1-9



Yihui Arts Hand Painted Abstract Oil

Renewed in Sacrifice

So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I am able. – 1 Chronicles 29:2a

More than anything in the world Israel's King David wanted to build a house for God. But it was not to be. The warrior king, who was also a musician and a poet, spent his entire reign fending off Israel's enemies. At the end of his life, David was convinced that it was God's will that his son Solomon succeed him as king, and that Solomon should build Jerusalem's Temple.

This is all recorded in 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible. David called together his cabinet members, the heads of the tribes, and all of his generals and officials and spoke to them, and to his son, laying out the details of God's instructions. He reminded his leaders to be faithful; to keep the Lord's commandments and not stray from them. Serve God with a willing mind and heart.

Just as he asked the people to do, David made an offering of his own for the sake of God's house. The account is from 1 Chronicles, chapter 29. Before we read it together, let's go to God in prayer.

Holy God, each week we gather in this house of yours – given to us mostly by others. We come to look into your word together. We thank you for both. For those who went before us. Thank you for inspiring their sacrifice. Thank you for your inspired word. Today we want to know and understand more of you. Holy Spirit, guide us. We are ready now to hear you, God. Reveal your will to us, we pray. Amen.

King David said to the whole assembly, "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple will not be for mortals but for the LORD God. So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble in abundance.

Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the

house of my God: three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir (offer) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold, and silver for the things of silver.

Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the LORD?”

Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king’s work. They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron.

Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I went to school before Title IX. So for me, there weren’t many opportunities to participate in school sports, but I have two younger sisters. They played basketball and soccer. My middle sister ran track. Man, was she fast!

Tricia was a sprinter. She ran the hundred. In those days there was a 75 yard dash. Ours was a relatively new school, and girls track was new. Just about every week the coaches were changing the sign in the gym because my sister had set a new school record. I was so proud.

I went to as many meets as I could. Track meets are long, but interesting with so many different kinds of events. My favorites, by far, were the relays. Tricia was almost always the anchor. Particularly in the 4x 100, the handoff has to be swift and smooth. It’s thrilling. I’ve thought a lot about those races in these last weeks of our Renew capital campaign, and the verses from the New Testament book of Hebrews that were our Call to Worship this morning:

*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...
Let us run the race...that is set before us, looking to Jesus,
the pioneer and perfecter of our faith
who for the sake of joy ... endured the cross.*

The writer is comparing our life in faith to a race, calling us to run it with passion and perseverance.

We are surrounded by a great crowd of witness -- those who have gone before us. They are in the stands, cheering us on. They know, and we know that success requires sacrifice. My sister did not become a champion by taking it easy, standing on the sidelines, refusing to sacrifice. Her success took predawn practices, running in the rain and sleet, awful shin splints, sprains, and other injuries. Sacrifice is what it takes to win.

The Hebrew writer holds onto the race metaphor until we recognize that our Lord made the greatest sacrifice of all to bring us to God. The readings this morning are about two very different believers who made sacrifices for the sake of God's house – a poor widow, and a king. They're not the only ones. The Bible is full of stories of people who gave their all for the sake of God's word.

King David's personal commitment to the capital campaign reminds me a lot of the account in Exodus when Moses took an offering for the Tabernacle in Exodus 35-36. The people brought so many gifts that the committee told Moses to make them stop! They said: *The people are bringing much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.*ⁱ

Let's make that happen here! I want us to exceed our goal as well! Let's go over the top on this. We are well on our way.

The poor widow whose sacrifice Jesus noticed in the Temple reminds me a lot of a single mother the prophet Elijah met in Zarephathⁱⁱ. She gave in trust, a small amount. That was all she had. She's like the boy who gave Jesus his five loaves and two fish. In both cases what happened next was a miracle.

Since we began the capital campaign I have heard dozens of stories of sacrifice and renewal. Scott McKenzie, our coach for the campaign, told a story of sacrifice and blessing that I haven't been able to get out of my mind. It happened a few years ago at a Methodist church in Texas. On the Saturday before Easter the church caught fire and was badly damaged. Insurance didn't cover everything. So they did what all churches must do when they have expenses beyond what the operating budget can handle – they held a campaign for God's house.

At one of those home-base meetings Scott watched a young woman hold her pledge card, looking at it and turning it over and over in her hand. There were tears running down her face. He was concerned for her, so afterwards he walked over to her, and looked at her as if to say, "Are you all right?" "I was so angry." She said, reading his question.

"I'm a teacher and a single mother. My ex took everything when he left. I love my church and I tithe because I believe what the Bible says. And now you are asking me to give more! I want to help, but I just couldn't see how; that's why I was crying."

Then she continued,

"Then I turned the card over and I saw this chart on the back. I looked – up at the top left corner and saw that \$10. And I thought \$10. I can do that! Then I looked at the next column and it says \$10 a week for three years is over \$1500, and I thought, 'I can do that!' Then I was crying because I realized there's a place for me in this. I can help!"

True story. Scott said that by the time she was finished, he was crying too.

Not two minutes later an old man, probably in his '90s walked up. "I've helped build five churches," the old gentleman said. And Scott expected him to say, "And I'm done. Don't ask

me to do any more.” But that’s not what he said. He said, “And I’m going to help rebuild this one too. I may not live to see it finished, but I’ll be a part of it just the same.” And, you know, he didn’t live to see the work completed, but he’s alive in those people, in that place.

It’s one of the best things about being part of the church life here at Woods. We know that we are doing something lasting here, something that will outlast us. With the Renew campaign we are part of a long line of faithful people – a great cloud of witnesses who gave generously, even sacrificially.

There’s a quote we’ve been using in the Renew leadership team:

Not an equal share
But an equal sacrifice

Equal sacrifice is what I see in the two scripture passages we heard this morning. On the one hand we have a wealthy man, David, a king, giving his own gold and silver to build the house of God. On the other end, a poor widow, with nothing to her name, giving her last few coins. Not equal shares, but equal sacrifice.

David would not live to see God’s house completed. And the poor widow? I don’t know. I do know that our sacrifices, like theirs, make miracles happen. Sacrifices for these spaces bring hope to tens of thousands of people every year...because Woods Church is a place where transformations happen. You heard from some of our members who shared theirs last week.

You’ve said how much you appreciated the ones who stepped up here and shared their stories last week. I hear stories of transformation like theirs all the time – I hear about cancers cured and families reconciled. I have the privilege of helping children and youth grow up strong in the faith, and I get to see them take their place in the leadership of this congregation and other congregations. I have that joy-and so do you!

At Woods we are transforming lives and the community through Christ’s love because you and I support these ministries with our sacrificial gifts. I have already told you that my husband and I are making a sacrifice pledge to the Renew campaign. It’s not all we have, but it is far more than we’ve ever pledged to any effort ... ever, because we believe in what Woods is doing. We believe in the vision. We believe in our leaders. We believe that God works miracles of transformation.

Is it scary? Oh yeah. But it’s also exciting. C.S. Lewis, in his book appropriately titled The Joyful Christian, wrote: “The only safe rule is to give more than you can spare.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Last Monday night on Veterans Day I had dinner with my favorite vets. Sam, a WWII vet, is 93. He wasn’t feeling well and couldn’t make it this year. Frank is a Korean War veteran, and my husband, Tawes was in Viet Nam. These guys know about sacrifice. I was honored to share their day.

Here's the most important thing about these 3 men -- they love their churches. During their service their congregations prayed for them. They are grateful -- to have been able to return and serve as lay leaders in their churches. All three have made enormous sacrifices of time, talent, and treasure looking to Jesus. They are my heroes, along with so many of you.

*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...
Let us run the race...that is set before us, looking to Jesus,
the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.*

Last week Bob Royer and Dave Bremer, our co-chairs for the Renew campaign, told us that some of the key leaders of this church have run the first leg of this relay. They have given over a million dollars. The goal is in sight. Now it's time for the handoff. You and I need to take this the rest of the way home.

In a few minutes we are going to have the dedication of our Renew pledges. When all is said and done my hope is that you and I will simply be able to say with King David,

I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I am able.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ Exodus 36:5

ⁱⁱ 1 Kings 17

ⁱⁱⁱ C.S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian*, Scribner, 1996, 144