

**FIRST LESSON: 1 Kings 17:8-16**  
**SECOND LESSON: Hebrews 9:24-28**  
**THE GOSPEL: Mark 12:38-44**

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost**  
**November 11, 2018**

**“Generous Living, Generous Giving”**  
**Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

The joy of preaching today is I get to get close to your heart because I am going to talk about something called money. There is a pastor’s joke about this that back in the days of the Evangelism of Africa that there would be strong tribes where men had depended upon their swords as their position of power. Of course to defend themselves, so in their baptism they would do everything except go under the water, they wanted to lift their sword out of the water because they needed to depend upon that. So the imagery for America is as we baptize in here, most people will go under the water so to speak, but we want to just keep this thing just a little bit out of the water. This is my billfold, ok? Because for some reason, this little thing that contains lots of resources, known as cards and a little bit of money, is it touches our heart and this is all about the matter of the heart. So I hope to encourage you that as you think of money you think of a resource to declare the Lord’s heart and to be in touch with your own.

The First Lesson spoke of Elijah as he was called to a place far out of his countryside, actually out of Israel up into Lebanon. As he went, he had this demand from the Lord to go there, he met this woman who was basically going to prepare her last meal for herself and son because of their utter poverty. He encouraged her to go ahead and follow her plan, but make a little bit for me. That’s a subtle way to share the love of God, but it is an amazing thing that from our resources when we give and share with others, there is an opening of the Spirit, it can be as miraculous as this, or it can be just a gentle connection that when we are connected to other people through giving that we are opened. I just wanted to say with this miracle that there is a statement of truth here, which is that we are called to encourage one another.

The phrase that I have for this is *living generously, giving generously*. The living generously part is the part I want to focus on right now. It is a statement of understanding that we need encouragement to live generously, it starts with understanding the generosity of God. The amazing grace, all that we have comes from God. I have heard it phrased this way, “You can’t out-give God because God has given all.” So in this, just as Elijah spoke a word of hope that there would be no running out of food until the drought which extended for three and a half years, there would be no running out, due to the word of the Lord.

I want to declare to you some word of the Lord phrases that are helpful. The first one I want to use is one from Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom – *Whoever loves money never has enough, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.*

Money is a tool, it is a resource. Now it's a funny tool and it's a funny resource. We have a home in Tucson that we have rented out. Before we were called here I thought that's where I was going to go. I don't know if you know about Arizona property, but it kind of goes up and down, have you noticed that? Nebraska kind of chugs along. I would hear a statement about what our house was worth on a piece of paper and I would say "Debbie, we are rich." Two years later I would get another piece of paper, "Debbie, we are poor." It's funny that we are buffeted by this resource, this tool to put our confidence there, but if you put your confidence in the money, you will never be at peace.

In Hebrews, chapter 13, *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said, 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.'* This is taken of course from that 1 Kings reading. This understanding of the presence of God's love is where true confidence comes from. This encouragement – *For where your treasure is, from Matthew 6, there your heart will be also.* This understanding of what is most valued in your life, what is most important in your life. Where truly is your treasure? Scripture speaks of a pearl for a great price, it is understanding of God's love for you and the confidence that comes from this tremendous investment of relationship from God into our lives.

I will conclude with this text from 1 Timothy, this was encouragement to a young pastor on how to preach – *Command those who are rich in this present world, not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so they may take hold of the life that is truly life.* I love that phrase – *take hold of the life that is truly life.*

So my encouragement for us as we move forward for this fall season which is known as the time of pledging, I wanted to share what was on my heart. New to the congregation, but certainly feeling the angst that reserves have been spent to cover operating losses, and yielding a position of financial weakness, it was difficult for me to join in. In fact, I would say that is was disorienting. My confidence comes from this, when I was first called here, and evaluating that. I just basically said to God, "If you want me to be here, I'm coming." That's confidence, so I did not do a lot of due diligence, but as I have been here I have felt like the first month I was here was a little bit of time of grieving. I heard stories from people, not so much technical analysis, just grieving.

So I wanted to share that as I was mulling over there, I was trying to figure out how to lift up stewardship. Stewardship to me is one of the most fun aspects of church. At my previous church, this was the most fun board to be on. Can you imagine that? The first thing I had to do was to take stewardship and separate it from the finance people. The finance people are rather grumpy. I can say that I was a cost accountant at IBM. I can tease. Finance people have a different stewardship obligation – right? This is an incorporated entity. We need to have a budget, we need to make sure that cash flow is an absolutely vital role. But stewardship is the joy of giving, the joy of receiving, the joy of sharing stories and encouraging one another.

I just want to give you a special notice, next year we are going to have a Stewardship Board or a committee, or at least something in which we raise up this joy of giving. I was trying to figure out without a stewardship board, how should I do it? Ideally, pastors want you to give generously to the church, but we want it to be a spiritual exercise. It's a time to recall God's abundance and to take a leap of faith with others to invest in the ministry of the church. Yes, it does assist in planning for the upcoming year's budget, but honestly – I was stuck.

I was confused and somewhat fearful by the financial concerns, so what would be a good course of action? This man to my back, Pastor Chuck, came to my rescue. As I shared my fears and concerns, he shared something with me. I just loved it. His key insight after his years of experience is of course that financial giving is first and foremost between the giver and God. That's where the primary relationship is. Certainly with the church, between the giver and God, so I am going to send out a letter this week that will find a faith pledge card and an envelope for you and your family to prayerfully complete. I will ask you to bring forward your pledges as an act of worship at any of the services on Christ the King weekend, which is November 24 and 25. But, here's the key – no one is going to open your envelope. This is between you and God and we promise here at the church to safeguard these pledges and return them to you unopened next fall as a reminder of your heart's desire. I want to emphasize that – your heart's desire for reflecting God's generosity in your life. I don't care if you are full blown member, an associate member, or if you just come here to worship, all of us can join in this act, no matter where we are called to, we are called to be generous. This is between you and God, so that's the key. No one is going to open it. It's a matter of worship from the heart.

Pastor Chuck also reminded me that many of us discount our estimates of giving because we are concerned with our own life about what's going to come up, or we are concerned we don't want anybody to build an extravagant budget. So this faith pledge is what you truly want to give, no discounts needed – it's between you and God, to open your heart to God. We can agree on this one principle of faith, we can trust God. God loves this congregation, God loves you, so build your faith pledge on this truth. With this truth I have full faith that our church will be generous for the remainder of this year and in 2019, reflecting this amazing love of God to each and everyone.

I want to end with something just a wee bit sweet. Sometimes I chuckle at myself of what I will do to get a message across. Let's see how this works. In the back, I saw this little sign that says *Pledge Cards here*. I saw that and sometimes I imagine there was a basket to drop it in or something like that. But this is what I want to do. I want to take that from there and I want you to do this. Pledge cards here – in your heart. Make this a time of spiritual renewal for our congregation, between you and God, when we unify in this beautiful and delightful and just amazing experience, there will be an opportunity for us to proclaim this love of Christ, to invite others to participate in our faith community, and be a blessing in word and deed. That's the big punch line. We are not going to use this pledge card technically to build a budget, it will be a conservative budget next year, no doubt about that, it will be conservative because it needs to, we need to take on a debt payment, so there will be less staff, we will need to figure out ways to work together with our volunteers. We need to keep an eye on things. I have full confidence working with Donna and others that we will put together a budget that is technically sound. I don't want to stop there I want it to be a matter of the heart. That's the most beautiful thing as a pastor to see your heart touched by the Lord's love.

Be ready for a letter, please prayerfully take that as a chance for you to reflect with your family what it is that God has given you and how you want to share. Don't discount it, make it your heart's intent. That will be on Consecration Sunday that we will remember for a long time.

Let us pray. God, our faith pledge is to you, and as we proclaim and invite and we bless, I ask this special blessing on the congregation. Help us on technical issues to be balanced, but God, unleash your spirit for us. The words of encouragement for our hearts to be touched by your generosity, your love, the absolute truth of your love to our families. I ask this to be a time of spiritual renewal for our congregation. In Jesus' name. Amen