



PEACE
LUTHERAN

CHURCH & SCHOOL

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN
DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

ONE CHRIST

ONE PEACE

ONE MISSION

About this Devotional Study

Some of the most powerful images in Scripture occur during moments of solitude... moments when someone sets aside all of the noise and chaos and demands to have one-on-one time with God. Sometimes these moments occur voluntarily. Sometimes these moments are thrust upon a person. But in these moments of solitude God captures the attention of His child, steps into history, and changes things. Consider:

- **Jacob** the night before he sees his long-estranged brother, Esau.
- **Moses** standing in front of the burning bush.
- **Jonah** in the belly of the fish.
- **Samuel** lying down in the tabernacle, hearing an unknown voice calling his name.
- **Elijah** exiled and alone in the cave, waiting for God to come by.
- **Joseph** as he is considering sending his betrothed Mary away quietly.
- **Jesus** in the wilderness.
- **Jesus** before He chooses His 12 disciples.
- **Jesus** in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- **Paul** on the road to Damascus, stripped of his sight for the days that followed.
- **Paul** being tormented by the thorn in his flesh.
- **John** on this scrubby little island, hearing behind him a sound like rushing waters.

In every case, and in many, many more, God captured the attention of His child, stepped into their story, and changed them.

Now I'm fully aware of the context of this devotional guide: we are entering into a capital campaign, at the end of which we are all going to prayerfully turn in our commitment cards. And the cynical part of us wants to look right past this devotional guide. The impatient part of us wants to skip to the end. The anxious part of us wants to get this over with...or not to deal with it at all. We modify Jesus' "let this cup pass from me" into our own "I don't want to do this!"

But let me encourage you to press the pause button. And each day for the next 29 days to have a moment of solitude. 10 minutes a day. Just between you and your Heavenly Father. Give Him some time to grab your attention, step in to your story, and change you. Allow Him to lead you. No agenda. No pressure. No guilt. No expectations.

Just be his child, spending time with your Heavenly Father. One on one. In solitude. In gratitude. To see what happens.

Pastor Werre
October 2016

Title**Text****Week 1**

October 16 - 22

We Give Thee But Thine Own

Extreme Grace
 Exposed Comfort
 Exercise Faith
 Experience Purpose
 Experience Calling
 Exceptional Worship

CW #485

John 1:14-18
 Matthew 13:1-23
 Colossians 4:12-13
 Matthew 28:16-20
 1 Samuel 3:1-10
 Romans 12:1-2

Week 2

October 23 - 29

Take My Life? Really?

Explore Promise
 Examine Priorities
 Explore Promise
 Exercise Faith
 Extra Effort
 Extravagant Blessing

CW #469

Luke 11:9-11
 Luke 12:13-21
 Luke 12:22-34
 Luke 19:1-10
 Matthew 6:19-21
 Mark 14:3-9

Week 3October 30 -
November 5**From Blessed to Blessing**

Examine Commitment
 Examine Commitment
 Exude Gratitude
 Exude Gratitude
 Extra Effort
 Examine Commitment

Genesis 12:1-3

2 Corinthians 8:1-5
 2 Corinthians 8:7-8
 2 Corinthians 8:9-13
 2 Corinthians 9:6-15
 Mark 12:41-44
 2 Samuel 24:18-25

Week 4

November 6 - 12

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

No Excuses
 Expanding Giving
 Examine Commitment
 Expect a Miracle
 Expanding Influence
 Express Joy

CW #441

Luke 14:15-24
 Luke 19:29-35
 Matthew 6:5-19
 Matthew 14:13-21
 Acts 4:32-37
 John 3:22-30

Commitment
Sunday
November 13

From Grateful Hearts**1 Chronicles 29:1-10**

We Give Thee But Thine Own

We give Thee but Thine own
Whatever the gift may be.
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.
(Christian Worship #485)

We often sing these words (from Hymn #485 in Christian Worship) as the offerings are brought to the altar. They offer a simple prayer that sums up our biblical attitude for stewardship. And yet when we consider each line, we realize how special, unique, tender, and counter-cultural this prayer is:

We give Thee but Thine own. Everything we have, everything we are, everything we will become, and everything we will attain comes from the gracious hand of our Heavenly Father. Even more than that, all this belongs to our Heavenly Father. We are merely stewards—managers of His resources, investors of His finances, caretakers of His property. And one day, when He returns, we shall present the fruit of our labor to Him to demonstrate the degree of our stewardship.

Whatever the gift may be. Throughout this campaign you will hear this mantra repeatedly: Not equal giving, but equal sacrifice. My gift may be different from yours. Because frankly, this isn't a competition. This isn't some prideful "my gift is better than yours" game. The gift is given out of a heart of gratitude for the Giver and The Gift, Jesus Christ. Whatever gift we give in return pales in comparison with His gift of life, forgiveness, and salvation. And yet we come bearing gifts to Him out of hearts filled with devotion and thanksgiving.

All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee. A trust. A pool of resources stored up so that, when the time comes, they can be utilized for the benefit of the person named in the trust. An investment God has set aside. And the person named in the trust? You.

But here's the catch: God has also set aside a trust—a pool of resources—for people who don't know Him yet. And we pray that, through this campaign—no, through our gift, whatever it may be—generations of men, women, and children will come to know The Giver Jesus.

And so every day through this campaign we will pray this prayer together:

Prayer: *"Dear Lord, help me discern a sacrifice for our capital campaign that is a meaningful and joyful response to your gift of eternal life. Give me the courage, peace and wisdom to trust your promise to always provide, and lead me to commit my support to your soul-saving work through our church and school."*

eXtreme grace

John 1:14-18

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.” (John 1:14, 16)

What is the nature of this campaign? Some capital campaigns come from a heavy-handed, law-driven approach, emphasizing what we must/should do for God.

This campaign and this devotional guide take a different approach by starting at a different place. This campaign starts with Jesus and what He has done for us. It starts by reflecting upon the heart of God as a giving, gracious heart. It starts by recalling how the Holy Son of God came and made His dwelling among sinful, imperfect, rebellious people—people who often demonstrate a demanding, grace-deprived heart. And yet, through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus demonstrates the extent of His heart for us. He forgives. He promises. He loves. He heals. He chooses. He blesses. He pours out grace upon grace upon grace. Because that is His heart.

And He does it all for you.

As we mentioned in yesterday’s reading, everything we have, everything we are, everything we have accomplished, everything we will become, every blessing we have ever received in our lives comes directly from the hand of our loving and grace-filled Heavenly Father.

In the explanation to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther makes a list of all of the physical, material, financial, and relational blessings God has showered upon us. Then he continues:

“All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”

As we go through this campaign together, let us place the grace of God first and foremost in our mind.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for blessing me with grace upon grace upon grace, especially Your Son Jesus. Everything I have and everything I am comes from Him. For which I simply say, “Thank you.”

eXposed comfort

Matthew 13:1-23

“The one who receives the seed that fell among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22)

“You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

Comfort. Security. Trust. There is a deep-seated desire within each of us to find these things. Throughout the Bible God reminds us that ultimately they can only be found in our relationship with Him. Meanwhile every day we are bombarded with commercials and attractions deceitfully offering us true comfort, attempting to lure us into their trap. Jesus reminds us what is at stake in this battle for our hearts: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the world, and yet forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:26)

Whenever we talk about the relationship between our faith and our finances, and especially when we have a campaign like this, we are reminded of this battle. It is placed right in front of us. We have to deal with it. And as we prayerfully consider our response to God’s abundant grace in our lives, maybe we realize how we have placed our trust in things rather than in God. Maybe these words strike an uncomfortable-and-yet-faith-inspiring chord:

“Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life, having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity, and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery, where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizon of our hopes, and to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love. This we ask in the name of our Captain, who is Jesus Christ.”

Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596), British vice-admiral, second person to circumnavigate the globe from 1577-1580

Prayer: Disturb me, Lord Jesus. Where I have placed my faith in things, forgive me. Through this campaign, help me to place my trust in You alone.

eXercise faith

Colossians 4:12-13

“Epaphras is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, and be mature.” (Colossians 4:12)

Wrestling is an ancient sport. In the first century, wrestlers struggled for their lives, not for TV ratings. In the language of the day, the wrestling ring was called the *agone*, and the wrestlers were called *antagonists*. Such is this word-image that Paul uses to describe the work of prayer from a spiritual leader of the Colossian church, Epaphras. Paul tells the church that Epaphras wrestles in prayer for them. We would catch Paul’s wordplay if we say that Epaphras agonizes in prayer for them. What a powerful image - and a biblical image too - like Jacob wrestling with the angel all night for a blessing (Genesis 32:24-31) - and like Jesus praying so fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane that his sweat became like drops of blood (Luke 22:41-44). And remember why Jesus agonized so? For you! He then suffered and died for you! It is God’s will that you know Him as your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. God has created you. (Gen 1:27) God has redeemed you—bought you back from slavery to sin. (Gal 3:13) God has sanctified you—made you holy. (Acts 26:17-18)

What is so important that Epaphras would pray so fervently? That the Colossian church would know of God’s love in Jesus. That the Colossian church would grow in their knowledge of God’s will and in their maturity of faith.

This capital campaign is a call to prayer for each of us in our congregation. We will be encouraged to reflect on a simple question -- What would You do through me, Lord, to make Your will happen in this church? Genuinely reflecting on that question will mean prayerfully wrestling with God’s will in your life and with God’s will in your church. This challenge is a time to exercise your faith. The struggle to respond faithfully will not be – nor should it be – easy. As Paul would later say of Epaphras, “I vouch for him that he is working hard for you.” The process of making a decision will not be – nor should it be – short-lived. Like Jacob, you may spend more than one restless night wrestling for an answer and a blessing. Ultimately, knowing what Jesus did for you is what creates the joyful response!

Our church needs an Epaphras. Our church needs people who reflect upon the saving message of a Savior and who pray earnestly to seek God’s will. Would you be willing to pray, to wrestle hard, for the future of this church?

Prayer: Lord, let me see your love in all you did for me and lead me in prayer to wrestle hard with Your will. I will hold fast to You until I find Your blessing.

Action Item: Make a list of things you feel the Lord is causing you to wrestle with in this campaign.

eXperience purpose

Matthew 28:16-20

“Go therefore and make disciples....” (Matthew 28:19)

When a church has a capital campaign, everyone seems to have the same kinds of questions: What are we building? What will it look like? What color will the carpet be? What will it cost? As we walk through this capital campaign we will also ask more personal, introspective questions: What is my part? What is God calling me to do? Fundamentally, all of those “what” questions are far and away the least important questions to ask. The most important question in a capital campaign is not “what,” but WHY.

Why are you building? Why are you expanding ministries? Why are you eliminating debt so the church can invest itself better in ministry programs? Why is your church here? Why are you here?

No church builds a structure just to have a nice building. No church expands ministries just to be a bigger church. No believer makes a financial commitment just to get some kind of service or program benefit. Believers – and churches – do not give their lives or their resources or their selves to a building or to a program or to being bigger. What believers will give their lives to is a God-pleasing purpose. So the most important question to answer in any capital campaign is not what, but WHY.

Why is your church doing these things? The answer is simple. We love, we respond, because God first loved us. What does God call this church to do? Here we are reminded of our congregation’s purpose and mission: To give glory, honor and worship to our Triune God in all we say and do; to know Jesus as Savior, to grow in our knowledge of God and service to each other, to go into our community and the world with the good news of Christ’s forgiveness.

The last commandment Jesus spoke for every Christian was, “Go ... make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” Every church and every Christian has a God-given purpose. To be and to do what God calls us to be and to do. And how does this capital campaign provide tools for your congregation to respond to that calling? This campaign is not simply about buildings or finances. This campaign is about reaching and teaching and changing the lives of people with the good news of Jesus Christ. The resources raised provide the necessary tools to help us better reach, better teach, more effectively bring the Word into the lives of those people who need salvation.

We all need Christ. Our lives have been reached, taught, saved by the witness and ministries of this church, which connect us with the saving message of Jesus. Would you like for other people to have a story of faith to tell and a purpose for their lives? Their stories depend now on hearing the good news of our Savior. Together let us faithfully share this good news.

Prayer: Lord, grow my passion for Your purposes in my life and in my church. You bought me with your blood. You have brought me here for a reason. Show me what You would do through me.

eXperience calling

1 Samuel 3:1-10

“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:10)

In the time of Samuel, the Bible says, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days, and visions were not widespread.” It is easy for people to feel the same way today. Who has heard God call their name? Who turns to the Bible to hear and learn His Word? And what great, godly purpose drives your life?

Many people seem to want to think that the word of the Lord is rare, that the word of the Lord only comes to people like the pastors. Many people seem to think that God has no clear purpose for them.

Maybe, like the boy Samuel, we simply are not spending enough time listening to God’s Word. Perhaps it is not an encouragement from God that is rare, but faithful listening and learning from God’s servants that is so rare.

Every Christian has a calling. Martin Luther defines it in his Small Catechism: *All this Christ did (died and rose to redeem me) that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.* In other words, Christ redeemed you so that your whole life serves Him forever.

Within this calling, every Christian has several callings -- as well as the God-given gifts and blessings to respond to those callings. Martin Luther calls this the “Theology of Vocation.” God calls us to be a parent, a child, a spouse, a sibling, a worker, a neighbor, a friend. And within each of those callings, God gives us what we need to love and serve others on His behalf. To be, as CS Lewis puts it, a “little Christ” to people.

Every Christian is called to be a faithful steward of the talents and time and resources God has blessed them with. A faithful steward responds joyfully to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a calling that only you, moved by the Holy Spirit working in your heart, can make a decision about. You can ignore that calling completely. You can brush off that calling by responding only in minimal ways. Or, recognizing God’s claim over your life, you can wake up and listen to God’s Word and His desire for your life. How will the Lord use you in this campaign? “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Prayer: Lord, by Your word and by the Gospel You have called me not only to be a hearer, but to be a listener and a doer of Your word. Throughout this campaign, speak to me and lead me, that I may live faithfully according to Your word and calling.

Action Item: In your daily prayer time make note of the ways that God is reaching you through his Word. (e.g. sermon, Bible reading, etc.)

eXceptional worship

Romans 12:1-2

“Offer yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is.” (Romans 12:1)

“Love the Lord your God ... with all of your mind.” (Matthew 22:37)

If you were going to develop your personal faith T-shirt, with your favorite verse or motto written on it, what would that T-shirt say? What words describe your attitude toward faith and life? Or, to capture Paul’s words from Romans 12, what kind of “living sacrifice” do you endorse?

So much of the marketing culture around us promotes the greatest, the most successful, the most famous, the coolest. And this culture can capture us and conform us to its own set of values of what is right and wrong. The rate of change in our culture—of new and different things in entertainment, technology, politics, sports, social constructs, the marketplace—is mind-blowing. And with all of this change, our culture’s values change. And we change too.

In Romans 12 Paul talks about two kinds of change: 1) conforming and 2) transforming. Conforming carries a negative connotation as we agree to something that we really don’t agree with. Transforming implies an intentional change based upon a set of values. In the case of our faith, God transforms our minds and our hearts to look at life through the lenses of His word, grace, and faith.

What does it mean to have our life be molded by the mind of Christ? What does this transformation look like? How has your relationship with Jesus changed your mind? How have your priorities changed? Why change your mind? “In view of God’s mercy.” (Romans 12:1) Our motivation is not to fill a requirement or to soothe a conscience or to earn God’s blessing. Our motivation is a thankful response to what God, in His mercy, has done for us!

Prayer: Lord, lead me to see things differently, to think differently, to live differently. Give me Your Holy Spirit so my mind may be transformed according to Your will and desires. And may my whole life be a living sacrifice to you.

Action Item: What “mind-set” do you have about this campaign? Positive? Negative? Anxious? Stubborn? Have you already made up your mind? Be honest here – write these things down. Then pray about these things and ask the Lord to transform your mind according to His will.

Take My Life? Really?

*Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee;
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

(Christian Worship #469)

This is one of those classic, timeless, heart-felt hymn-prayers, sung out of grateful devotion to a loving God who has provided so abundantly for His children. It's a prayer that expresses a complete, no-reservations, totally-yielded spirit, reflecting the language of 2 Chronicles 16:9: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him."

In the remaining verses of the hymn, the prayer expands to include various aspects of our personhood, asking that the Lord would empower us to dedicate these to Him as well: our hands and feet, our voice and lips, our will and heart. Verse 4 of the hymn starts:

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.

Not a mite would I withhold? Now hold on a minute, God. I have a mortgage to pay. And bills. College and retirement accounts to fund. Food to put on the table. And do you want me to feel guilty about vacation? Let's be reasonable here!

God surely calls us to be responsible with our financial obligations and commitments. But what about our commitment to Him? From the earliest accounts of the Biblical narrative, the community of faith has always presented God with offerings from a heart of thanksgiving and praise. This act was the way for people to publicly declare their devotion to God through their offerings. It was a heart-check. It was a value within the family of faith. And when giving to God ceased, so did people's faithfulness, for their heart was no longer in it.

Is your heart "in it?"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for providing for me. Take my life, my whole life, as an offering of my heart.

Action Item: Make a list of things that, when you are honest with yourself, you feel are "off limits" to God in this campaign.

eXplore promise

Luke 11:9-11

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Luke 11:9-10)

Most of us are good at the first step of prayer. It is easy to ask God to do something! Unfortunately, after we ask, we think we are finished. We say “Amen” and stop praying. We don’t need to do anything else.

The first step in any journey is critical. Jesus does start off with “ask.” But asking is just the first step. And why should we ask God for anything? We ask because God has promised that we will receive (everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened). But He doesn’t stop there. And for us to end our prayer with “ask” truncates our prayer-life.

Jesus offers His disciples a model for a much richer prayer-life. Ask – yes, of course! But also seek. And also knock.

“Seek” is much more than simply “ask.” Seeking takes time, attention, listening, looking, searching, planning, responding. Seeking God’s will in prayer moves us into new roads where God shows us how to take new steps of faith and faithfulness by the power of His Spirit. Along these paths God will direct us to new doorways—places where choices and decisions must be made. And here He instructs us—knock—with the promise that the door will be opened. But knocking takes boldness, courage, faith, and confidence that God will be with us and will lead us no matter what lies on the other side of the door.

Asking is pretty easy, and demands little of us. Seeking means searching. Knocking may lead us down paths that we never imagined! We don’t know what God has in store for us. But one thing is certain—this journey of prayer will change us. As CS Lewis put it: “I pray because I can’t help myself. I pray because I’m helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. [Prayer] doesn’t change God; it changes me.”

Prayer: Lord, You invite me to come to You asking, seeking, and knocking. As we move through this campaign, I ask You to lead me. I seek Your will for my life. And I come knocking, asking You to open new doors for my life.

Action Item: Make a list of things to pray about that are not physical items nor merely safety-related requests, but are specific spiritual requests.

eXamine priorities

Luke 12:13-21

But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:20-21)

This fall we are going to be witnessing candidates on both sides of the political spectrum racing toward The White House, promising the American people their election will open the door to the great American Dream. Which of course should lead us to consider, “What is The American Dream?” While I don’t know if anyone has done a scientific study of this question, my assumption is that the vast majority of people would define The American Dream by economics. Financial security. Economic opportunity. Fiscal freedom. Material goods. Owning a home (or homes) and cars, taking vacations, building college and retirement funds. Now obviously none of these are bad things in and of themselves. But the faith question before us in this campaign is this: Is our life, as Christians, defined merely by our economic status? Is The American Dream the only thing we are living for?

In Luke 12 Jesus presents a counter-cultural message. This farmer has a harvest unlike any that he has ever had before. He is printing money. And so what does he do? He tears down his old barns and builds bigger barns. Better barns. Newer barns. More technologically-advanced barns. Barns that will be the envy of everyone in the surrounding community. And who can blame him? If we had the kind of year he had, we would probably do the same thing! He has realized The American Dream!

But then God comes to Him with these sobering words: “You fool.”

Jesus reminds us: “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” As Christians, we know that God has given us a greater purpose than mere economic pursuits. Above building our own kingdom, God has called us to build His kingdom. And He has blessed us financially and materially for the purpose of building His kingdom.

What do you dream about? Imagine this “dream:” one day, as we are celebrating Jesus’ ultimate victory together with all of God’s saints in heaven, someone comes up to you, grabs your hand and give you a big bear hug. And this person whispers in your ear: “Thank you. Thank you for your response to Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. I’m here today because you and the people at Peace shared the Gospel.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, because of Jesus You have made me rich in so many different ways. Increase my faith, so that I may be rich toward You and seek to grow Your kingdom.

Action Item: Write down your financial goals. How and where does “being rich toward God” fit it?

eXplore promise

Luke 12:22-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes... For the pagan world runs after such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you.” (Luke 12:22, 30-31)

What are we seeking after?

In this text, Jesus tells us that it is completely possible for our focus and our energies to be consumed by the things of life—clothing, food, etc.—and meanwhile totally miss God. Such is the orientation of the non-Christian world around us, after all! (Are we no better?)

But Jesus offers a different way: Seek first God’s kingdom. And He couches this different way with an assurance: Our Heavenly Father loves us and even sacrificed His Son to provide for us spiritually. And He promises that He will provide for us financially and materially. He may not give us everything we want, but He has always provided everything we need.

As we walk through this campaign, we will be asked to prayerfully consider where our heart lies: with Jesus and His kingdom, or with the stuff of our culture. And with the answer to this question we will make personal decisions about how to allocate our resources to support Jesus’ work at Peace.

Another way to put this very personal question: As I examine my budget and how I’m spending my money, what does this say about where my passion is? What am I worried about? Where is my heart? With the Lord and His mission? Or with stuff? Am I seeking Jesus above all other things? Or am I just seeking after things?

Jesus makes it clear:

Seek “needs,” miss God. Seek God, gain needs.

Action Item: What are you worried about financially? Use the space below to make a list of your worries. Then spend a few minutes asking the Lord to help you trust Him in all things.

eXercise faith

Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house...”

(Luke 19:8-9)

Maybe you remember the song: “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see...”

But maybe what we don't remember about Zacchaeus is who this man was. Luke tells us quite a bit about him, actually. Zacchaeus was a Jew. But he was also a tax collector. Tax collectors had a reputation. They would sit by the road side at major intersections or at the entrance to a city arbitrarily imposing taxes upon passers-by, known for corruption and embezzlement, licensed by Rome to carry out their task with the power of imprisonment. Jewish tax collectors were thought of as turn-coats who willingly subjugated their Jewish heritage in favor of Roman oppression. Zacchaeus was one of those guys. And he was rich. Implication: he was really good at collecting taxes, skimming off the top, stealing from his countrymen. Al Capone would have been envious of Zacchaeus' operation and methodology. During Zacchaeus' statement in verse 8, he says, “If I have cheated anybody...” Implication: he had! But Zacchaeus was not just a little rich. He was exceedingly rich. So much so that he could liquidate what he owned to give half of his possessions away and pay back four times what he had stolen.

And yet Zacchaeus had a need to see Jesus. Despite his vast wealth, he realized money can't buy you happiness, peace, joy, and salvation.

We have no idea what happened between Jesus and Zacchaeus other than they had dinner together. But through the course of that meal, Jesus dramatically changed Zacchaeus' heart.

In this moment we see that faith is not a mere abstraction. Jesus had gifted Zacchaeus with riches money simply can't buy. And, overflowing with thankfulness and joy, Zacchaeus simply had to respond to this gift with faithfulness. He had to make things right. Zacchaeus didn't buy salvation; he lived according to his salvation. Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house!” and then continued, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Rescued, Zacchaeus was grateful to exercise his faith.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have brought gifts into my life that money simply cannot buy. Help me to express thankfulness and joy for the gift of faith.

eXtra effort

Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

We tend to grow uncomfortable when the church talks about money. We start to sweat. We get defensive. We feel guilty. Why is that? Maybe we feel like the church is always trying to get our money. Maybe we have tried to keep our faith separate from our finances. Maybe we think, “It’s ok to talk about Jesus and love and forgiveness and all of that spiritual stuff; but my money is private.” Maybe we are uncomfortable with talk about money because that conversation is getting awfully close to the heart of our faith.

And yet we know God has specific things to say about our finances. In fact He places a great deal of importance on our attitude and our choices regarding our financial blessings.

Did you know that, in the New Testament, God uses these words:

- Believe, Believing – 275 times
- Pray, Praying – 371 times
- Love, loves, loving – 714 times
- Giving or give – 2,162 times

Jesus knew that our treasures and our hearts are inseparably linked. Jesus knew that dealing with our treasures is one of those critical places where the rubber meets the road ... where the practicality of our faith is tested ... where what we believe becomes tangible and real.

Remember the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19? We have no idea what happened between Jesus and Zacchaeus other than they had dinner together. But we do know that Jesus reached and dramatically changed that person’s heart. Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house...” Zacchaeus learned of Jesus’ full and free forgiveness. And just look at how this eternal life-changing message affected him! Follow the money! Look at what happened with Zacchaeus’ treasure. Half of what he possessed he gave immediately. Every wrong he set himself to make right. The treasure of his heart was now Jesus. He who now knew salvation responded with his whole life, even with his money.

Prayer: Lord, remind me every day that salvation has come to my house, and lead me to love You with all my heart – and with all my life!

Action Item: Sketch out a simple budget of where your treasures are (of where your financial resources go), including your current giving to the church. What steps might you take to demonstrate to the Lord your love for Him?

eXtravagant blessing

Mark 14:3-9

“But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me.’” (Mark 14:6)

Can you picture the scene? The word on the street was that the authorities were looking for ways to arrest Jesus. Jesus and His disciples gathered at the home of Simon the Leper for dinner. This was time for a serious conversation between Jesus and the other dinner invitees.

A woman walks into the room. Who invited her? She walks up to Jesus. Who told her she could come over here? Can't she see we're talking about important things here? She takes out a jar of expensive perfume, breaks it, and pours it on Jesus' head. Who gave her permission to do that? Who does she think she is? Can you imagine the aroma? Most people when they use perfume, just a little dab will do. She poured out the perfume like football players dousing their coach with Gatorade. What's wrong with this woman? Why waste all this expensive perfume? It could have been sold, and the money given to the poor.

But Jesus knows this woman's heart. At some point Jesus had changed her life with His forgiveness and grace. And her response? She simply had to find a way to tangibly express her gratitude... to show how her heart was literally overflowing with love for her Savior.

It isn't uncommon, during a capital campaign, for people to debate how raised funds should be used. Some may think, “I want to give money to people, not to bricks and mortar.” This debate is based on a false dichotomy. In truth, our campaign isn't either-or; it's both-and. Investing in bricks and mortar is an important way to impact the lives of people in our community.

But instead of arguing the point of all that could be done, perhaps we should ask a different question. Is what we are doing honoring Jesus? Is what we are accomplishing furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are we showing a heart overflowing with love and gratitude?

Prayer: Lord, You lavishly poured yourself out for me! Give me the heart and desire to fully respond and to joyfully give to You. Lead me to glorify and thank You, even as You have blessed my life.

From Blessed to Blessing

Genesis 12:1-3

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2, 3b)

In our life of faith there are transition moments. Maturity moments. Moments when we turn the corner. Moments when our attitude and behavior changes from being me-centered to being us-centered or even other-centered. Moments when, for Christians, faith and life come together with such clarity that we simply cannot do otherwise. Paul talks about this: “When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man I put childish ways behind me.” (1 Corinthians 13:11)

In the text from Genesis 12, God visits Abraham and blesses him. But note how God arranges this blessing. This blessing doesn't end with Abraham. It isn't meant to end there. This blessing would be incomplete and unfulfilled if it remained sitting in Abraham and Sarah's tent. God intended this blessing to turn into a greater blessing—one that would start with Abraham and go forth to all nations. Even to us.

In this campaign we are talking about making a decision and commitment that flows from a heart full of faith. A decision about leveraging the gracious blessings God has given us to bless others. A decision that demonstrates the maturity of our faith. A decision that embodies the transition from a me-centered faith to an us-centered faith and even to an other-centered faith. A decision that doesn't rest until it has turned blessed to blessing. Because we realize it is for this purpose that God has blessed us: to bless others.

As we turn the corner in our campaign, we will begin to prayerfully consider how to move from being merely blessed to being a blessing. And we trust that, over the next two weeks, God will lead us and direct us—even bless us!—according to His will...so that we might then mature in our faith and bless others.

Prayer: Almighty God, I cannot express the gratitude I have for the richness and the abundance of Your blessings in my life. But by the power of Your Holy Spirit, work in my heart today so that I may not rest until Your blessings reach their final goal: being a blessing to others.

Action Item: In the space below, list between 1 to 5 blessings that the Lord has shared with you in order to bless someone else. How might you take a step to bless someone else?

eXamine commitment

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

“They gave themselves first to the Lord, and, by the will of God, then to us.”
(2 Corinthians 8:5)

Have you ever watched a tee-ball game where the children are just beginning to learn baseball? Have you ever seen a child, so excited to hit the ball off the tee that the youngster runs directly to third base and then races back to home plate to score?

Too often we think of giving to the church as a financial decision rather than a decision born from our faith. We shortcut the ground-rules, like the child running directly to third. We rush to start off in the wrong direction. We hurry the process. As a result, we may make a donation to the church, but we do not grow in faith.

To make this kind of decision that is pleasing to God, it is important to start with first base, then second, then third. Reaching first especially means knowing “about the grace that God has given” us. (1 Cor. 8:1) It means knowing of God’s undeserved love that brings us salvation and inspires us to live a life of service in joyous and generous giving. Another way of putting it: this campaign is NOT, first and foremost, about raising finances; this campaign is, first and foremost, about exercising faith through the study of God’s word and prayer. If we “run the bases” from first to second to third, exercising our faith along the way, we trust the Lord will guide us according to His will.

In 2 Corinthians 8:5, Paul says of the Christians in Macedonia, “they gave of themselves first to the Lord, and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” Getting to first means giving ourselves to the Lord before deciding on a financial commitment. Making a godly decision means internalizing Jesus’ sacrifice and grace, not making some quick, reactive accounting decision. First comes the faith commitment, then the financial calculation. First things first.

Immerse yourself in the love of Jesus. The Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, create within me a heart of faith. A heart that hungers and thirsts for You. A heart that trusts You. Then let my decisions grow out of what I believe ... and out of what You call me to be and to do.

Action Item: First things first. Before rushing to make a financial decision, think about these questions. Who has God called me to be? What is God calling me to do? How is God working in my life now? What could God do through me? How can I give myself more fully to Him?

eXamine commitment

2 Corinthians 8:7-8

“Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in the love we inspired in you – see that you abound in this gracious work of giving also. I am not speaking this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love.”

(2 Corinthians 8:7-8)

Praxis is the point where our faith and our actions intersect. Praxis is the point where what we believe joins together with what we do. To put it simply, praxis means walking the walk as well as talking the talk!

After making our commitment by earnestly seeking God’s will in His Word, it becomes time to turn faith into action by considering what we can do and committing to what we will do. We are rounding the bases - finding ways to practice what we believe.

As we round the bases and turn faith into action, we ask another faith-driven question: “Lord, what have You equipped me to be and to do?” What blessings do You want me to share? What good work have You prepared me to accomplish? How can I think creatively about giving - beyond the narrow box of my income and expenses - in order to give of myself fully? Are there assets beyond my monthly income that I can give? Can I create new resources to give with my talents, gifts, and time? Does my commitment lead me to change other priorities in my life, reducing spending and thus freeing up resources for giving?

There is no one “correct” plan that is right for everyone. There is no formula for the right financial commitment. Making faith real is a unique journey for every individual. Your praxis is your way of walking the walk. Talking to the church in Corinth, Paul knows there is no formula for giving. He realizes that he cannot command anyone about giving. Giving has to grow from the heart. But, as Paul well knows, giving is a test of the heart in action, a test of the genuineness of love. Giving is where what we believe gets real.

Prayer: Lord, in Your word You have told me about the extent of Your grace and blessings. As I prepare to make a financial commitment, help me to be a doer of Your word.

Action item: Develop a list of as many ways of giving that are possible to you (for example: changing spending, monthly commitment from income, gift of assets, etc). Begin to think of your commitment as a worksheet, and use this list as you determine your pledge over the next two weeks.

eXude gratitude

2 Corinthians 8:9-13

“For you know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”
(2 Corinthians 8: 9)

There it is. The reason for, the model for, the example for our giving. Our financial commitment is based in and inspired by the grace and the sacrifice of Christ himself.

The most familiar, and perhaps most important, words in the New Testament are found in John 3:16. “For God so loved ... He gave ... His only Son ... that everyone who believes in Him ... might have eternal life.”

God loved. And so He gave. God so loved you ... that He gave His Son ... that you might have eternal life. This is what “sacrificial giving” truly means.

Has Peace blessed your life?

If you have been around Peace a while, you have seen other capital campaigns. Maybe you can remember the prayerful decision you made at those times to commit so that other people might hear about Christ and be influenced by Peace’s ministry. I pray that you know: the sacrificial response was worth it!

If you are new to Peace, then you are the beneficiary of the sacrificial gifts of Peace members from years ago. For them, you were worth it.

God gave. Other people of faith have given. Now it is time for your faithful, hopeful, joyful response. “Now finish doing this, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has.” (1 Corinthians 8: 11-12)

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the inexpressible grace You have given to me. As I prepare to make my commitment, help me to discern a sacrificial response that is both meaningful and joyful. Bless my gift, and use my gift to bless others in Your name.

eXude gratitude

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

A capital campaign ... above and beyond giving ... sacrificial giving. Someone will describe such capital campaign giving in this way: “I know what that means ... it means give until it hurts!”

Give until it hurts? Here’s a better way to put it: sacrificial giving means losing something meaningful to build something even more meaningful. Giving up something you care about to give to something you’re passionate about. The effect of such giving should not be “hurt,” but rather joy; for in this act of giving we support those things that are most important to us.

“Give until it hurts” misses the point. For God loves a cheerful giver. Faith-driven sacrificial giving is also joyful giving. The joy of making a difference in a God-given calling. The joy of aligning your life with God’s grace and will. The joy of a meaningfully and purposefully committed life. The joy of doing your part along with a whole community of faithful people. The joy of helping to make miracles – large and small – happen. The joy of seeing people’s lives change because of seeds you planted and nurtured. The joy of impacting someone’s eternity. The joy of glorifying God.

Indeed, as Paul says to the church in Corinth, “you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God.” (verse 11)

No one is being asked to hurt in this campaign. “Giving until it hurts” is just the wrong motivation. This campaign is about living in faith together, following our Savior, and experiencing the joy of His will.

Prayer: Lord, teach me greater joy in a meaningful, purposeful, committed life, all in abundant thanksgiving for a Savior who love me.

eXtra effort

Mark 12:41-44

“Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned.”
(Mark 12:43)

After a long morning of teaching in the temple courtyard, Jesus took a break with His disciples. Sitting right across from the temple treasury, their gazes drifted over to observing many people who were depositing their offerings. One person after another walk forward, deposit their offering, then walk away. Rich people making substantial deposits. Then a poor widow comes forward...with two small copper coins. It isn't hard to imagine that she came forward with a mixture of conflicting emotions: “Should I leave these copper coins here? Or should I just leave?” And then there are these two copper coins. Even we know what copper pennies are good for, right? Pretty much nothing. And yet for her... they were everything.

Never one to miss a teachable moment, Jesus asked His disciples about what they had seen. “Who put in more?” is the implied question. The answer is obvious to anyone reading or watching -- those who gave the greatest sums put in more!

Jesus turns the tables on the obvious, teaching His disciples an important principle of giving. Giving is not measured by dollar amounts; giving is measured by sacrifice. Some gave large sums offered out of their surplus and gave gifts that they would never even miss. But what this widow offered meant the world to her, even though it was just a penny. Her gift affected her life. Her seemingly small gift is the one Jesus singles out for praise. She put in more of herself than all of the others combined. Her gift was an act of worship, of love and of trust. Jesus could look into her heart and know that her gift was given in faith. She clearly gave because she trusted that God would provide.

Commitments are not about equal gifts, but about the spirit in which they are given. Not everyone has the ability (the resources) to make a multi-million dollar gift; but every person does have the ability and the opportunity to meaningfully invest themselves in what God is doing in their church and to do so out of love for what God has invested in him/her, - His only Son who was sacrificed on the cross. In terms of the commitment, rather than the amount, honor God through your sacrificial gift, an offering that shows what is most important in your life.

Prayer: Lord, each and every gift makes a difference to my church. Teach me to give in response to your love, and to joyfully and willingly give in a way that makes a difference in my life.

eXamine commitment

2 Samuel 24:18-25

“I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord my God that costs me nothing.” (2 Samuel 24:24)

Imagine this scene. King David is preparing to build an altar to the Lord to make a sacrificial offering. He approaches Araunah the Jebusite in order to buy a piece of his land to set up the altar. But when he hears about David’s intentions, Araunah makes a startling offer: “Let my lord take whatever he wishes.” In other words: “Let me donate this land to you! Take whatever you want!” Araunah was even going to throw in the wood and the oxen for the sacrifice! For free!

Then David makes an even-more-startling statement: “I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord my God that costs me nothing.” When he takes stock of everything God has done for him and everything that God has given to him, David weighs Araunah’s offer and sees it as the cheap and easy way out. While it was certainly an attractive and generous offer, David saw this as a matter of deep personal conviction, integrity, and faith. For David, honoring God meant sacrifice. Because sacrifice is the way of God—as Jesus would demonstrate some 1000 years later.

At this point in our campaign, we are making the turn toward home plate. We are getting close to filling out a commitment card. We have first given ourselves to the Lord. We have prayed for God’s will to be done in our lives. We have reviewed our resources in order to find a way to respond to God’s gracious blessings and invitation to step out in faith. And now we are preparing to respond to God’s blessings with our sacrificial gift.

Any gift will make some difference to the church; but the kind of faith-infused financial decision that is a part of this campaign is different. For this gift will make a difference in you as God creates a spirit of joy in you. A spirit that honors Him through sacrifice.

As you prepare to make your campaign commitment, consider David’s attitude and prayerfully consider this question: does my gift demonstrate the kind of sacrificial commitment that honors God? If so then realize you are not just sharing your gift; you are sharing your faith.

Prayer: Lord, as I prepare to make my campaign pledge, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, create within me a faith that honors You through sacrifice.

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

*O God, Our Help in ages past, Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home.* (Christian Worship #441)

God has richly blessed his Gospel among us at Peace for 115 years!

We're more interested in where the Lord is taking us right now and into the future, but we can surely trace his "help in ages past." From a handful of German Lutherans meeting in a living room who were visited by a pastor on horseback from Marshall, we have gone through many building projects and grown to be a congregation of 750 souls with a school serving age 3 up through 8th grade served by a faculty of 9.

Our campaign remains rooted in the biblical story of God's great love (Lam. 3:21-16). He prepared a plan from the very beginning to save his children from their sin (Gen. 3:15). Throughout the centuries his grace unfolded through his promises to Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and all the prophets (Gen 6, 12; Ex. 34:6-7; Is. 7:14, 9:2-6). In his time and in real human history he came - as a baby born to redeem us (Gal. 4:4; Luke 2; John 3:16). Jesus fulfilled all of God's promises and all our dreams as he took sin to the dungeon of death and returned from the grave with new life (John 20:31; Rom. 4:25; 1 John 4:7-19).

Our God still delivers on his promises, always... every time. Consider the promises He delivers through Word & Sacrament: deliverance from death and the devil, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of our bodies, the Holy Spirit to give us faith and to comfort us, our status as co-rulers with His Son, His Son's impeccable righteousness, the fellowship of His Church and companionship of His holy angels, the goodwill of our heavenly Father through Christ's atoning sacrifice. It's not that God CAN or MAY or WILL give us these gifts. He DOES give them right now when we hear His Word and celebrate the Sacrament.

In addition to all this He is such an intimate Friend to us, He draws us into His work, His plan, including us so that we become contributing participants in that most awesome work of saving other souls from everlasting darkness to the light of never-ending joy in heaven. Can there be a higher calling?

This is why God has preserved Peace congregation for 115 years -to be His witness in Sun Prairie. We can count on Him to sustain and preserve us as we gather around His Word and Sacrament. We can count on His promise to be with us as we carry out His great commission to go and make disciples.

Prayer: We are SO BLESSED to have the love of Christ taught in our congregation! Father, do not hold back on your blessings to us because of our sins. Savior, redeem us by your perfect life and innocent death. Spirit, grow our faith so that we can grow in our sharing of the Gospel.

Action Item: Write down your initial number for a commitment. This may or may not be the final amount...simply the amount you have on your heart today.

no eXuses

Luke 14:15-24

“Come, for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.”
(Luke 14:17-18)

What do a championship sports team, an orchestra, and a jigsaw puzzle have in common? Each of them understands the importance of synergy.

In Greek, syn means “together,” and ergo means “work.” Syn + ergo = “working together.” But the two words, when combined, mean more than their individual pieces. As a concept, a group with synergy accomplishes greater results than the individual parts. Championship sports teams understand synergy. Playing together means the team accomplishes more than what the individuals could accomplish. However, if even one team member fails to do his or her part, the team loses. An orchestra understands synergy. Second violin players may not carry the melody, but without them the symphony lacks richness and depth. And what is the most important part of a jigsaw puzzle? The missing piece! Without every piece exactly in its place, the picture doesn’t look like anything!

When it comes to this campaign, some people will immediately find reasons NOT to participate. They will decide to recuse themselves even before they have heard the vision, before they have prayed, before they have dedicated themselves to the Lord. And the result? Not only does our congregation fail to reach its potential impact, but so does the individual.

A modern parable might begin like this:

The kingdom of God is like a capital campaign. God gave His people a vision. “Come!” said God, “Take your place prepared for you. With thankful hearts for this free gift, take up your part in My work. Everything is ready now. All of you are invited to enjoy this blessing. When you take your place and take up your part, all will be blessed to break bread in My kingdom.” But they all alike began to make excuses.

Your participation in Our Savior’s mission is unquestionably significant. No one can play your part but you. No one can give your part but you. Others can only do their part. No one can make up for your part if you opt to sit out.

Prayer: Lord, how quickly do I come up with excuses when Your call makes me uncomfortable. Compel me, through Christ’s love, to respond to Your call in whatever ways I can.

Action Item: Make a list of the excuses that come to your mind that may keep you from fully stepping out in faith with respect to this campaign. Be honest with yourself and your Lord.

eXpanding giving

Luke 19:29-35

“The owners said, ‘Why are you untying the donkey?’ [The disciples] said, ‘The Lord has need of it.’” (Luke 19:33-34)

What is the “donkey” in your life...the tied-up resource that the Lord needs?

Proverbs 3:9 encourages us to “honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce.” Your monthly income stream (your “produce”) may not be the only resource in your life to make a gift from. People often have valuable assets (your “substance”) beyond their income stream. By looking at all of your resources, not simply your income stream, you may discover assets in your life which, if untied, can help you to give a far-more-substantial gift than you thought possible. Consider:

- A retired family on fixed income could give only a limited amount per month. That same family could also give a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the seldom-used lake-house (now that the children and grandchildren had grown and moved away);
- An ex-fighter pilot and businessman gave the proceeds from selling his passionate hobby – an airshow airplane;
- A collector donated the proceeds to part of his art collection;
- A mechanic sold his Harley on Craigslist and offered the money to the Lord;
- A songwriter gave the rights to a song she had written;
- A family gave some of the property that they had inherited;
- Another family gave stock gains that they had speculated on; they were able to be given tax free.

Why did these people give things that they enjoyed and owned that had real value to them? Simply stated: the Lord had need of it. What they were giving to meant far more to them than what they were giving up. These people found ways to leverage otherwise-tied-up resources. Once untied, the “substance” which they had been blessed with could now be used as an even greater blessing. Like the owners in Luke’s gospel who provided Jesus with a way into Jerusalem, these people had a donkey -- and the Lord had need of it. Maybe it is time to untie your “donkey” for the Lord’s use. For He has need of it.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see how much I have been blessed with in my life, especially with the gift of a Savior – and to see how things may bring a whole new sense of blessing as a gift.

Action item: Make a list of assets that you could untie in order to enlarge your giving.

eXamine commitment

Matthew 6:5-19

“This, then, is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9-10)

As we have already talked about, this campaign is not primarily about making a decision based on our financial position; it is about making a decision based upon our faith in God. These kinds of decisions based on faith must always consider the larger context by asking: Lord, what is Your will?

In his explanation to The Lord's Prayer, Martin Luther writes: “How is God's will done? God's will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, which try to prevent us from keeping God's name holy and letting his kingdom come. And God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and in the faith as long as we live. This is his good and gracious will.”

First and foremost, God's will is about bringing His kingdom to life—about people coming to faith in Christ as their Savior and being strengthened in their faith. So when we pray, “Your will be done,” we are asking the Lord to help us use our time, our abilities, and our financial resources as a means to this end. We are placing God's kingdom directly into our decision-making process, intentionally inviting His input and guidance. It means genuinely asking, “What would You do through me, Lord, to make Your will happen here at Our Savior?”

This decision will be a commitment that invites God into the dialogue and involves God in the discussion through prayer. This decision becomes much more than just my sense of goodwill; it means discovering and acting within a sense of God's good will. To know God's will, we need to read the Bible and think about what it says about God's will for my life. Then it is time for prayer... for listening and learning and reflecting on how God might use you to grow His kingdom for eternity. It is time for asking and searching and seeking how God is leading us to expand our faith through the use of our financial resources.

Prayer: Lord, I want to honor Your name. I want Your will to be done in me and through me. I want Your kingdom to come here in my life and in the ministry of Peace. Help me to discern a gift that is meaningful and joyful to accomplish Your will.

Action Item: Spend a few moments today praying to the Lord, seeking His will. Review your initial commitment, asking the Lord to confirm this commitment of your faith.

eXpect a miracle

Matthew 14:13-21 and John 6:1-11

“They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” (Matthew 14:16)

“There is a boy here with five loaves and two fish, but what are they among so many people?” (John 6:9)

Jesus had been with the crowds all day, ministering to people’s needs. It was getting late – past suppertime. “Send the crowds away,” the disciples told Jesus. Their mindset: let them go home and take care of themselves for a while. Surely you do not expect us to be responsible for all of their needs, right?

When any church is challenged with growing needs, it would be easy to say, “Just send the crowds away. Surely it is not our responsibility to minister to all of these needs.” It would be easy saying that to a bunch of other Christians who are also ready to go home for supper, but don’t say that to Jesus. Jesus’ response was, and still is, clear. “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

A crowd of more than 5,000. How can we meet that kind of need? It’s overwhelming! As Philip says in John’s version, “Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them even to get a little!”

The hero of this story (other than Jesus) is this boy. He saw the need and was determined to do something about it. True, all he had was five loaves and two fish. But he felt he had something the Lord could use. He obviously had no idea what Jesus was going to do next. So he offered his gift to the Lord in faith, trusting that the Lord would use it according to His will.

Jesus took the gift, blessed it – and the crowd of more than 5,000 were fed.

Do you always recognize God’s miracles? A miracle may include a person demonstrating faith, stepping out and asking Jesus to bless the gift. Expect a miracle. The need may seem overwhelming. The gift may appear to be inadequate. But Jesus is the creator of miracles. Expect God to work in and through you – along with the rest of the Peace family - to accomplish more than you ever imagined.

Prayer: Lord, with your blessing and Your power, multiply my gift to accomplish Your will here at Peace.

Action Item: Write down your commitment figure. As you think about your part—your gift—in this campaign, remember: no one can do your part for you. You have a part in this miracle that only you can provide.

eXpanding influence

Acts 4:32-37

“There was a man named Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”).” Acts 4:36

The name “Joseph” is such a fine name. In Hebrew, the name means, “God’s added blessing.” This was the name for the cherished son of the patriarch Jacob. This was the name for Jesus’ earthly father. So why would the apostles give Joseph of Cypress a nickname like “Barnabas?”

Barnabas, Acts tells us, means “son of encouragement.” Apparently, this Joseph was such an encourager that a new name was in order. When the early church needed money to underwrite its ministries, Joseph sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles. When Saul of Tarsus (renamed Paul) needed a friend to welcome him into the church he once persecuted, Joseph stepped in and became that friend, nurturing Paul into a ministry of his own. When the church needed to send someone to encourage the new believers among the gentiles, they sent Joseph. When young Mark needed someone to believe in him and to give him a second chance to serve as a missionary, Joseph encouraged him. Any wonder that all of Joseph’s friends called him Barnabas – “son of encouragement?”

Peace church needs generosity to underwrite its future. We need leaders – encouragers who can speak up, step up, and help cheer others to passionate mission and generous giving. Your gift makes a difference. Your faith encourages others. Your influence is felt by others, and will become an inspiration. Be a Barnabas!

Prayer: Lord, help me to feel so joyful about my Savior and grow my desire to make a difference in your kingdom that I can be a witness and encouragement to others.

Action item: Make a deliberate effort to encourage one person in your life today: your wife, a co-worker, your child’s teacher, or others.

eXpress joy

John 3:22-30

“The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must increase, and I must decrease.” (John 3:29-30)

John the Baptist was a great man. Jesus Himself said so. John was the last of the prophets. When people heard him preach, they trembled. He attracted disciples, crowds, and the attention of the press. He even attracted the attention of kings and queens.

But when Jesus came, John never forgot his place. Despite being goaded by his disciples to be jealous of the early success of Jesus’ ministry, John remained steadfast in his sense of place within God’s plan. He rejoiced in the following that Jesus attracted. He even helped his own disciples join with Jesus. John 3:22-30 is John’s explanation of his own role to his disciples: Now my joy is complete. He (Jesus) must increase, and I must decrease.

Have you discovered this truth yet? Most of us think that joy increases as we increase – as our wealth, our prestige, our influence, and our power increase. But in fact, just the opposite is true. Lasting joy is not found at the top of the corporate mountain or at the pinnacle of power. Joy is not a reward of accomplishment. True joy is found where John the Baptist found it – by finding one’s place in relationship to Jesus Christ. The more important Jesus, His atoning work, His promise of salvation and His many gifts of peace and life become to me, the less I become the center of my own universe, the greater my joy.

Are you ready to find joy? Seeing Jesus take His proper place as Lord of our lives is something we can all strive for, under the power of the Holy Spirit. Taking specific steps to increase His will in our life while decreasing our own plans and ambitions leads directly to this joy.

Prayer: Lord, lead me to find joy and abundant living through Your perfect life and innocent death, and move me to give my life more fully to you.

Action item: Now it’s time. You should have received a commitment card in the mail or at church. Take a few moments and fill out your commitment card and prepare to bring it with you on Sunday.

Commitment Sunday – November 13

From Grateful Hearts

1 Chronicles 29:1-10

Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God... The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. (1 Chronicles 29:6-7a, 9)

Imagine the scene. King David has just walked forward and presented a huge gift to go toward building the temple in Jerusalem. Inspired by his gift, the leaders of families, the military commanders, and David's leaders lined up and walked forward to give their gifts. You can see the looks on the faces of the people gathered there as they watched their parents, their neighbors, their leaders, and so many other people walking forward to support the Lord's work.

And the result? Exceeding joy. Because the people gave freely and wholeheartedly.

It isn't often that we see this kind of act. Where a community of faith comes together with one voice and one mind to offer themselves to the Lord. Gifts both big and small (remember, not equal giving but equal sacrifice). Given out of hearts overflowing with gratitude for the abundance of God's grace. Given for the single purpose of growing God's kingdom and impacting lives for eternity.

It isn't often that we see this kind of act. But every now and then. On a day like today. We get to see it. We get to watch it unfold before our very eyes. We get to celebrate it together as the people of God.

And the result? Exceeding joy. Because the people of Our Savior gave freely and wholeheartedly.

And somewhere the Lord is watching, saying, "They have done a beautiful thing for me..."

Prayer: (Psalm 150)

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.
- 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,
- 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute,
- 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.
- 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD. (NIV)

Amen.

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**OUR SAVIOR
LUTHERAN
CHURCH**

1281 Acornwood Road,
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024
Phone: 262-277-4282
www.oursavior.org

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REV LUKE WERRE
232 WINDSOR STREET
SUN PRAIRIE, WI 53590
608-837-5346
www.peacewelssp.org

