

Sermon for Every Member Canvass 2017
October 16, 2016
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Why We Give

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Charlie Walch and I am co-chairing the 2016 Every Member Canvass. I've been an Emmanuelite for fifty years...which *is* my entire lifetime. As we gear up to celebrate our 150th anniversary, it hit me that I have experienced *fully one third* of Emmanuel's existence as a parish. So, when it comes to Emmanuel, it's fair to say I've seen a lot, done a lot, and lived a lot. I was baptized here, married here, baptized and raised my children here, and it is here, through Emmanuel, with Emmanuel, that I have strived to live a Christian life.

Our campaign co-chair is Brian Dale. Brian evens out our ticket so to speak...his family has been here one year. Brian, Fabbi, and their daughter have plenty of life to live right now. I thank Brian for jumping in to a leadership position this early in his season at Emmanuel.

Brian and I have a straightforward task: to encourage every member of Emmanuel to pledge a portion of their income to the church. By custom, the co-chairs pick a theme through which to frame the canvass appeal. Past co-chairs have spoken eloquently on the importance of stewardship: both to the church, the Body of Christ, and to our own spiritual development and Christian formation.

Over the years, Emmanuelites have been asked to go on a journey towards meeting the biblical tithe of 10%. We have met in groups at member's homes to share what Emmanuel means to us. There have been PowerPoints on our budget and aspirations for our future voiced. We have been invited to consider stewardship holistically; to give of our treasure, as well as our time and talents. And we have been encouraged to pay our pledge to Emmanuel first before all our other bills; to give the first fruits of our labor back to God just as the ancient Israelites did at harvest time.

In this Sesquicentennial season, I believe it is appropriate for Emmanuel to reflect broadly on *why we give*. To start, I invite you to look back with me to our beginning.

The Lockwoods

Before the Civil War, Richard and Angelica Lockwood owned a summer home near today's Old Orchard, which, back then, was an actual apple orchard. The story has it that on a stroll one summer evening in 1857, Richard and Angelica promised each other they would build an Episcopal church on their property. It was a promise they did not forget when the Civil War ended and a new community began forming in what is now Webster Groves.

Three hundred freed slaves from the Marshall farm in North Webster formed their own church, Old Community, on what is now Kirkham Road. Up the hill to the east, Webster Presbyterian and First Congregational laid their cornerstones. Further to the east still, at the edge of the apple orchard, Richard and Angelica Lockwood began building Emmanuel.

Why did the Lockwood's give the gift of Emmanuel? Missouri was terribly and personally divided between North and South during the Civil War. In Missouri, it was a guerilla war, complete with acts of savagery and terrorism, marshal law, spying and sabotage. The Lockwood's were pro-Union but Richard was part-owner of the orchard where slaves had worked. He had to have known and been on good terms with some Southerners. Webster, like Missouri, like the nation, was a house divided.

I can only speculate, but 1866 must have been a perplexing, exhilarating, challenging time to found a new community. Did a sense of gratitude meet with determination to compel the Lockwood's to fulfill their promise to build Emmanuel? I would be surprised if, after surviving the ordeal of the War and given the opportunity to start fresh, the Lockwood's would not have answered "in gratitude to God" when asked why they were giving so much.

Richard died in 1871. Angelica lived several decades on to nurture the parish. Their gift of Emmanuel continues on, granting us a place to worship God and share in his Grace.

Looking Ahead

About a hundred years later, in 1974, the Emmanuel Church Foundation was started with \$1,000 in donations in 1974. The ECF has now grown to over \$3 million dollars in endowed funds, contributing an extra \$125,000 annually to Emmanuel's budget. Almost five thousand gifts have gone to our foundation, many of them under \$50, showing how small gifts can add up to a whole greater than its parts.

If you have not pledged yet because you're afraid your gift will be too small, remember the Foundation's \$1,000 start in 1974 and make this year the year you start, secure in knowing that every member's pledge is a gift cherished and that with each dollar added we are strengthening our life together in Christ.

Joe Kortenhoff, one of the Foundation's founders, wrote a letter to the Angelus for Christmas 1977 which beautifully captures the power of legacy giving can have. I'd like to read you an excerpt:

"CHRISTMAS EVE, Tuesday, December 24, 2077

11:00 p.m. Service

"The church building is much the same. The huge oaks are gone now, but new ones have taken their place and they, too, are large...the sky is clear, and there is no snow on the ground. By 10:30 p.m. the church is almost full. As always, the Christmas decorations give a quiet happiness. Children are excited. Young people are glad to be home from college. Parents are proud, happy and tired – not necessarily in that order.

"By the start of the service, most of the Parish Family is present. But not one person reading this will be there. Worse, with very few exceptions, no one will even remember our names or what we did 100 years before. The exceptions? Perhaps our direct

descendants. Perhaps. Yet, almost miraculously, some of us will have a presence at that service – a giving presence.

“The Emmanuel Church Foundation will be producing, out of earnings only, an important part of the 2077 budget for Emmanuel. As you know, gifts to the Foundation are held in perpetuity, with only the income given to the church and only to Emmanuel.

“Won’t you join me at the Christmas eve service on Tuesday at 11:00 p.m. in the year of our Lord, 2077?”

“Grace upon Grace”

“Why do we give?” – there are many answers to that question, each of which validates aspects of what it means to be a good steward. Our bible is full of passages regarding giving and stewardship, many of which regularly make the rounds of our lectionary: the widow’s mite, the parable of the Good Steward, Paul’s Body of Christ, with all of its parts doing their thing...but today I’d like to take a quick look at a passage that isn’t often brought into the stewardship conversation.

It’s in the first Chapter of the Gospel of John. After “In the beginning there was the word and the word was God”, John the Baptist appears and pronounces the coming of Jesus to the Israelites. It doesn’t take the Apostle John long to bring the Baptist into the story – he’s arrived by verse 5; in verse 14 he has recognized Jesus as the word made flesh; he announces Jesus’ arrival in verse 15; and then in 16 John the Baptist says:

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

God’s grace as a foundation for giving? Seems to me that is a strong foundation for stewardship. God’s grace is always there for us to receive; it is love inexhaustible, grace upon grace. So why do we give? To recognize the Grace of God in our life?

Conclusion

Soon Emmanuel will send you a pledge card. When you receive it, consider saying a prayer of Thanksgiving to yourself...starting with – “Lord, thank you for helping me bring your Grace into my life...”

Then in the days remaining before our In-gathering of pledges on November 13th, consider taking a break now and then to reflect about your stewardship journey, God’s grace and your pledge for the coming year. Or consider using this spiritual time practically: give of your first fruits; start your 2017 household budget by making your pledge the first line in your “Expense” column.

And then, wherever you are on your stewardship journey, join us on the 13th to recognize and celebrate the Amazing Grace of God in our life.

Amen.