

Sermon on I Corinthians 9:1-15, Matthew 13
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First Lutheran Church, Aitkin

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

I like going to garage sales and will take time to do that when I can. Sometimes I find something I really don't need, but it's such a great bargain, it's hard to pass by. Other times I have found something I think I can use and it is really cheap. Often it is a tool that I could use. I may only pay a couple dollars for it. What I find is that sometimes I truly "get what I paid for it." It may be a tool that is somewhat worn out but will work somewhat.

We use the statement, "you get what you pay for" a lot. It means that if you don't pay too much, you won't get too much. Sometimes it is true like items from a garage sale. It also means that if you pay more, you will get more. Sometimes that is true and sometimes not.

But now let's look at this phrase from a little different angle: "You get what you pay for" in terms of an agreement or an exchange. It sounds like a contract and can be used that way. Probably when used this way it could be said this way: You pay for what you get.

I would like us to think today of paying for what we get in terms of our church, God's church that we are involved with. There are those who will vote on their church, the pastor, the programs with their money, with their offering or their time. If they don't like something, they will hold back their offering or time. It happens and is a sign of discontent.

But let's not think of that today. Let's think of paying for what we get that we are happy about in terms of God's church here on earth. Let's think about what is fair to offer to God's church. In the Old Testament, Moses told the people of God, the Israelites that religious workers should be paid. One example is when an animal is brought for an offering to God, the Levites, the workers in the sanctuary should receive the right thigh of that animal. A later practice was that when the animal was offered, the blood sprinkled on the altar and the animal was butchered and cooked in a big vat, the priests and others workers could take a long handled fork and poke it in the vat once. If they got a good piece of meat, well and good. If they missed or got a little piece, they had to live with that.

Moses also told the people not to muzzle the ox that treads the grain in harvest time. Let it take a mouthful of the grain or hay as it goes. That referred to animals doing the work but also to the people that did religious work. So there is a long history of paying for what you get in terms of religious life.

The apostle Paul takes this up in our text today from I Corinthians 9:1-15. Actually though, he goes at it from the opposite side. He tells the church at Corinth that he

deserved, he and his worker with him, deserved payment but refused to ask or receive any. Because they thought it would get in the way of proclaiming the Gospel in Corinth. Corinth was a tough church to work with. It had a fair share of problems, some very serious and they had a hard time getting along with one another and Paul. They probably didn't like too many of their pastors.

So Paul in his letter to them defends his right and his need to be compensated for his work. He refers to Moses and not muzzling the ox. He refers to a soldier being paid; a landowner receiving from his vineyard; and a farmer taking some of his flock to eat. He then refers to Jesus who said in Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7 that the one who proclaims the Gospel should get their living by the gospel.

All the while he is saying this, he continues to tell them that although he and Barnabas deserved this, they didn't ask for it. Paul thought in this situation it would interfere with the Corinthians hearing the message. Perhaps the Corinthians would have said Paul is only preaching this message in order to get their money. Maybe they would have thought Paul is only in this for the money. We don't know. But here Paul writes to tell them of what he and Barnabas deserved so they know their obligation in the future. And Paul wants them to know, he didn't ask so that the Gospel could be heard clearly by the Corinthians.

Now today First Lutheran Church, you who are the church are to start thinking of your offering to God's Church for the coming year. You heard the Temple Talk this morning and now I am going to say more. And if this is your first time in a church or the first time here at First Lutheran you might be thinking this was the wrong time to come. You may also decide it is your last time—but I hope not, for God is doing some great things with this church, its people, its programs, its pastors and that means you are being touched by Jesus Christ and touching others with Him.

Back to thinking about your offering, consider two things: 1) supporting the ministry of your church; and 2) showing your appreciation for what God is doing in your life through Jesus Christ and this church and all its ministries.

As you look at number 1, the ministries of this church, the list is probably somewhere between 35 and 50 ministries. If some Sunday, all the ministries were asked to put up a little booth, you would see all the hallways filled with them. Parish Nurse, Confirmation, Wednesday night worship, the various music teams, the men's groups, the Circles of the women, the choir, the sound and power point volunteers, the office helpers, Sunday School, ushers, Kings Men, Little Tots, Milestone Ministries---and this is really just the tip of the iceberg. I served a similar size congregation and when we actually did invite all ministries to put up booths, we had about 33.

The apostle Paul is telling us today that you pay for what you get. It is only right and an age-old custom of God's people to support their ministry.

In terms of number 2, this is fall and it is harvest time. In a few weeks we will celebrate Thanksgiving, a time to remember for what we are thankful. Last year as I went back to North Dakota to help my brothers combine corn and I was there when my brother Vincent started to combine the first field. He was doing the headlands and suddenly over the radio he says something to the effect, "Uffda! This field is going around 200 bushels to the acre." They expected something closer to 150 at best. This year, with the drought in North Dakota affecting them some, they thought it would be closer to 125 bushels. They got over thirty bushels more. Amazing. Jesus and His parable of the sowing of seeds and the bountiful crop that comes, still happens.

Maybe this year has been a good year for you and you are thankful. Maybe this year has been about the same as before. Or maybe this year has been a disaster and things are really tough.

As you start thinking about what you will offer to the Lord and His ministry through First Lutheran Church, you need to do some praying, individually and as a couple or as a family. What are you called to offer?

Through the years I have heard people say they can't give what they were giving and they feel bad. Others didn't know how much they should be giving and were a bit shocked to see it was smaller than they thought and were embarrassed. Others said they had no idea where to start in making an offering decision.

A very old Biblical tradition was to offer 10 percent to the Lord. This goes back to Jacob, running for his life from Esau, whom he has cheated out of the birthright. Jacob sleeps one night and has a dream in which God appears to him and says, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, your father Isaac and I will be your God and go with you and bring you safely back to your home in due time." Genesis 28.

Jacob awakes, decides that if the Lord will be his God and watch over him, he will make an altar to the Lord and offer one-tenth of all he has to the Lord. Why 10%? We don't know, but it became a tradition in the church. In reality tho, that may be a goal rather than a starting place. Lutheran across our nation give on the average 1.9%. That is terrible. My suggestion is that you decide not on an amount but a percentage of your income. I also suggest that if you aren't sure where to start, try 5%. If at the end of next year you say that isn't enough, increase it. If you find that you can't do this amount, then decrease it.

And if your financial situation changes during the year, one way or another, a percentage will allow your offering to flow with the ups or downs.

I doubt that you are surprised that as Christians we need to "pay for what we get". It is God's will and it enables God's Church to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, who has saved us and made us children of God! Oh, and by the way, our Lord Jesus takes our offerings and uses them like a sower of seeds to spread His love to all kinds of situations in our world.