

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward Jr.+ Rector

Scripture: various

***"Let Us Arise and Build (part 3)***

**THE BLESSING OF OBEDIENCE**

Last week we began with **Proverbs 29:18**: ***"Where there is no vision, the people perish, but blessed is he who keeps the law."***

In other words, we need a revelation from God *and* we need to obey that revelation. And the one who obeys will be blessed - and that goes for individuals, nations and churches. What are the blessings we are taking about - joy, peace, contentment, and knowing that you are in God's will. Jesus said in **Luke 11:28**: ***"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it."***

Now we have talked about the vision and the mission of St. Bart's these last few weeks. Nehemiah was given the vision by the Lord and he communicated it to the people. In the same way, God has given us a vision - begun many years ago - to be a Christ-centered, Bible believing Anglican Church committed to the Great Commission.

If the vision is what are to be, the mission is how the vision is fulfilled. Our mission is one that flows from God's Word: *"to proclaim the love and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and deed by the power of the Spirit and to the glory of God the Father."*

**WE ARE STEWARDS**

And one of the ways we accomplish the mission is by being obedient when it comes to the use of our wealth, our finances, our resources, our money.

In God's economy, it is all His. Now we live in a nation where everyone likes to talk about rights; the rights of our citizens. In God's Kingdom it is not about one's rights, it is about one's responsibilities. Why? All that we have is the Lord's. And He has entrusted us to be stewards over it all. A steward doesn't have rights, a steward has responsibilities. And the Bible says in **I Cor. 4:2** ***that is required of stewards that one be found faithful.***

And the Word of God is clear. We ultimately don't own anything in this life, not even our own bodies. From dust you came and to dust you shall return. All of us go down to the dust, yet even at the grave we make our song alleluia, alleluia. Why? The hope of the resurrection. But who is going to resurrect us - God - no one else.

So the first thing that I need to recognize in my relationship with God is that all is His. I come to Him by faith. I then I surrender all. It's His not mine. And then I should ask, "Lord, what would you have me do with all this you have given me - my body, my talents, my money?"

### **NEHEMIAH 10:37-39**

Nehemiah understood the importance of stewardship. So did the people who joined him. They trusted the Lord and then they were willing to surrender their wills in order to work together and then they sacrificed for the effort. How did they sacrifice? Not just with their time and effort but with their financial resources. When Nehemiah and the people of God rebuilt the wall we read that they brought their tithes and offerings to the Lord for the work and worship of the Lord. **Nehemiah 10:37-39:**

***"37We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.***

***38The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.***

***39For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God."***

So what does it mean when the Bible talks about tithes and offerings? The tithe referred to the ten percent that God's people were to give back to God for the worship and work of the Lord through the Temple. In other words, this was to be the minimum standard of giving. Offerings were those gifts over and above the ten percent for special needs and projects.

### **MALACHI 3:10-14**

Please turn with me now to **Malachi 3:6-12** for further clarification.

***6"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. 7"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?' 8"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! 10"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. 11"Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts. 12"All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.***

The point is clear. The people robbed God by not giving God the tithe which referred to ten percent of one's resources - whether it be produce, livestock, or money. All is the

Lord's and He charges us to give back ten percent to Him. So keeping it from Him is no different than stealing from Him. All was brought to the Temple and kept reserved for the sacrifices, for the priest's own domestic needs and for special emergencies. God even challenges them to test Him in this area and not only does the Lord promise His blessing upon them it will be a testimony to those around of the goodness of our God.

Has this standard changed? Some may say this is Old Testament and we are no longer under the Law. Well, Jesus never abolished the standard. In fact, He not only affirmed it but He even encouraged us to exceed it. Jesus paid the Temple tax. He commended the widow who gave all she had by putting in two mites. He challenged the young rich ruler to sell all he had and give it to the poor. The Apostle Paul affirmed generous giving above the tithe, too. For example, in **2 Cor. 8**, he esteems the sacrificial giving of the Church in Macedonia even though they were not a wealthy church. They gave to the needs of their fellow saints and the work of the Gospel generously. We read in v.3 ***"For I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord."***

So the standard of giving is the tithe. 10% of our gross should go back to God and that means to our local church. We take special offerings for those things above and beyond the budget. Tithing does not include giving money to family members - that's simply being a family!

Our mission initiative, *"Let Us Arise and Build"* is an example of a special offering. This faith journey calls on us to raise \$650,000 over three years. I believe it can be done and I'll tell you why. Only about 15% of our members tithe. That means there is great room for improvement. The truth is most people in most churches don't tithe.

What I think the Lord wants each of us to do is to ask the question, am I tithing - If so, great, can I sacrifice a little bit more during these next three years? If not, by faith I am going to raise what I give and I am also going to pledge toward the *Let Us Arise and Build* mission initiative.

### **A THREE YEAR COMMITMENT**

The ushers are passing out commitment cards for the *Let Us Arise and Build* three year faith journey. This week I want you to ask the Lord what would He have you give? Remember this is separated from our annual pledge card for the budget. Pray about what should be your commitment so that next Sunday we can all make our commitments before the Lord.

It will mean that we will all have to step out in faith. It means recognizing that all is the Lord's and He will provide. And it means that following God means sacrificing to the Lord. Jesus said, ***"Anyone who wishes to be My disciple must deny Himself, take up His cross and follow Me."***

Jesus also said in **Luke 6:38**: ***"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For***

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***with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."***

That, my friends, is a promise, a promise from the One who can not and does not lie. The one who is the way the truth and the life. May we follow that One, may we trust and obey our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!