

I'm about to talk to you about money, and our faith. If this makes you squirm and frown, I suggest you stop listening right now. Really. Plan your Sunday dinner, think about the latest podcast you want to listen to – which I'm sure won't have anything to do with money-- go over your shopping list. I get it.

Church giving 101: when did this giving to the church begin? Well—long before there were churches. Almost from the time we figured out that the world was vast and beautiful, and full of wonder and terror—we started giving offerings—tributes—to God who ruled everything, sometimes to placate and sometimes in gratitude to the being that was as far above us --at first literally, and then figuratively- as we were from the ants.

We evolved, and our concept of God evolved (thank you, Jesus) and we came to understand that God not only created and ruled everything, but that this ultimate being loved us.

And so, the people of God began to give—not out of fear-- but out of gratitude, love and honor.

And our concept of God wasn't the only thing to evolve—our methods of giving did, too. In ancient days, the people were asked to give the first 10% of what they grew – their livelihood-- to God—and they offered it in the public place where everyone met.

Remember—unless you were a king or noble, no one had actual currency. There was no hiding their assets either, because everyone knew what everyone had. So they gave the first 10% of their yearly household crops and livestock.

I'll be honest—there are not many people I have met today who figure out all their resources yearly-- and immediately give the first 10% to the church, before figuring out their expenses. But there are some. Bless their hearts.

I know we give what we think we can. And what do we see from that gift?

Let's look back on the past year. We have come out of the pandemic stronger than ever. We're not only back to three services a week here in this church, but we have added 7 online services weekly: Noonday Prayer five days a week, and Compline twice a week. We average 17 viewers at each of those online services, sometimes many more.

We have purchased a new digital system in the church which streams our Sunday services 2 weeks a month, and soon we will stream our service weekly—allowing everyone to participate—even when they're sick or homebound.

We have had two, and will soon have three opportunities a week to dig more deeply into our faith through study. We are soon to be a second Wayfinders group, with a third on the horizon. Sunday school theatre will begin twice a month beginning in January with our children.

We have added a meditation garden behind the parish hall during the warm months, and next year we hope to bring back at least one fair. We have a new lending library for everyone, in the Sunroom on Sundays—no need to check things out—take what you'd like and bring it back to re-share when you're done.

And never forget the faithful Altar Guild—who make our Eucharist possible, Flower Guild—for the beauty of their offerings to God, culled from God's own beautiful creation, our fabulous coffee hour contributors, Loaves and Fishes which feeds those who don't have enough food, and our Choirs—both children's and adult choirs who bring musical beauty to our worship! And other ministries, large and small.

It's time to take a bow--and it's time for all of us to take a leap of faith, because we face some big financial challenges in the coming year.

We face the same inflationary pressures as do all organizations and families in Maine and around the country, especially our ever-rising cost of utilities. We conserve energy during the week by keeping all but the offices on the ground floor of the rectory at 58 degrees in winter. Even so, the cost of our utilities was unusually high in October- and October wasn't cold. If we want to continue our current schedules and offerings-- we need everyone to contribute!

Stewardship means caring for what God has given us. If everyone – everyone—promises to help: with their time, energy and money-- we will not just survive, but thrive. To those who have, pray about giving a little bit more. For those who don't have as much—please make an offering of what you can.

Everyone: take a look at our mini- ministries, see what we needs to be done in our “house”, run for vestry, praise God in song, water some plants, rake some leaves. Let's finally clear out the clutter in our building—I'll give you a tour if you don't know what I mean. I'm hoping that clearing our space will encourage us to see our spaces in new ways, ways that can work for us.

The winds of Covid have blown through, and now we are encouraged to feel the wind of the Spirit as it pushes us to see what now is possible if we all band together and bring our offerings to God.

Amen.