

**“The Spirit Motivates ...Generous Giving”**

**Part 6 of Fall Preaching Series: *Holy Spirit Fall Afresh On Us***

**Romans 12:6-8; Matthew 10:7-8**

**Christ the King Sunday/Commitment Sunday/Thanksgiving Sunday**

**A homily preached by Rev. Dr. Ivan H.M. Peden**

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**MUMC, Thomasville, NC**

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My homily this week is entitled “The Spirit Motivates.” More specifically, I want to stress that the Holy Spirit motivates generous giving. God’s spirit motivates us to give generously of our time, talents, and treasure to the work of God. I do not apologize this morning for giving focused attention to the generous giving, more specifically, of our financial resources to the Lord’s work.

Scripture is full of examples and teachings about possessions, wealth, giving, generosity, offerings, charity, sacrifice, and sharing with those in need. Giving is at the very heart of who we are and how we live as Christians because we serve a God who, by giving us his Son, Jesus Christ, has demonstrated extravagant generosity. Giving flows from the very spirit of God’s Self. Not surprisingly, therefore, the apostle Paul – in Romans chapter 12 – lists generous giving by ordinary people like you and me as a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:8).

As we come now to the end of our Fall preaching series, *Holy Spirit, Fall Afresh on Us*, I ask you to pay attention to the teaching that generous giving helps us set priorities and focus on those things that are lasting, eternal and of infinite value. When we give generously God strengthens us, builds us up, and equips us to serve God’s purposes. A tithe, or one-tenth of everything we have, has been provided in scripture as the norm for our giving. When we tithe we really begin to understand that all things belong to God and that while we live on earth we are expected to be good stewards, using all we have and all we are in ways that glorify God.

I want to suggest that today the Holy Spirit motivates us to exercise the spiritual gift of generous giving while we look toward the ministry and work of this wonderful church in 2010. There is much that we hope to accomplish with the empowerment of God’s spirit and with your help. Briefly, I want you to support all of our ministries, but I cannot emphasize enough how necessary it is to support the following three ministries:

First, our growing Children's and Family Ministries. You have seen what a difference it makes to have so many more children coming forward during worship for the children's sermon ...then leaving for their own chapel service. The children of this church have been provided with an outstanding hands-on children's education curriculum called "Godly Play." But bringing Lynda Hepler on staff – which was a huge answer to prayer – and supporting her and the ministry to young families is not without need for secure financial support.

Second, we need to provide more adequate support for the music ministry of our church that has grown and become one of our strongest ministries under the present leadership. It is an unusual and unique responsibility that a music department should have to rely on fund-raising for part of its income – by selling pine-needles, pumpkins, etc. I hope that over a period of 2-3 years we will be able to own this wonderful music program more fully and relieve the musicians of our church from any fund-raising.

Third, we need to recognize that contemporary worship is a significant spiritual dynamic in the growth of 21<sup>st</sup> Century churches. If it is done properly, as I believe it is with the current team in place leading this service, then it needs our strong financial support. We must commit ourselves to continue to strive for excellence in both of our worship services. By so doing, we will demonstrate that we are taking seriously the value of diverse worship experiences in order to reach more people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me return to my topic of generous giving as something that God's spirit motivates. Generous giving comes from hearts and spirits that are in love with God, not from a sense of duty, or guilt, or to meet a budget of anticipated needs of our church. Yes, we should meet our budget in 2010, but there is no amount of teaching, coercion, begging or pleading that can influence our giving. What we give must come from our prayer life and our practice of spiritual disciplines as we grow further and deeper in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

When we give generously we have our faith stretched, we grow in our understanding of the richness of Christ's generous actions of love, and we fulfill Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 10: "Freely you have received, freely give."

Generous giving is done with an eagerness and cheerfulness according to what we have rather than what we do not have! Our giving during 2010 will have a lot to say about

the way we measure generous giving. Only we will know whether or not we are giving generously out of a spiritual awareness of our great riches as recipients of God's grace. Giving generously involves all of our resources, including our time. Responding to the motivation of God's spirit to give generously will enlarge our spirits, realign our priorities, re-connect us to each other, and strengthen Memorial as we fulfill the ministries of Christ.

“Freely you have received, freely give.” God provides more than enough when people share what they have been given. What would it mean today for those who had much not to have too much, and for those who had little not to have too little? How do the followers of Jesus learn to have enough, to be content? As followers of Jesus Christ, are we different from others in the way we use money? Do we buy things we don't even need with money we don't even have to impress people we don't even know? At some point followers of Jesus must decide whether they will listen to the wisdom of the world or to God's wisdom. We start to mature spiritually when faith values shape us more than material values.

Remember also that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of mission, and on this Sunday when we exalt Jesus as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, we are reminded that following Jesus is about being mission partners with the Holy Spirit to extend God's kingdom. Generous giving helps to meet our budget, yes, but – in the final analysis – it is measured more by what goes beyond the walls than what is used to keep this church going by paying the bills. Generous giving is about denying ourselves to lift the burdens of others, whether financial, emotional or spiritual, as the hands and feet of Christ. In other words, generous giving is about making sacrifices so someone else will begin to know God's grace and love.

I have preached on the Holy Spirit for six weeks. I hope that we have all felt God's spirit fall afresh on us as individuals and as a congregation. Surely the presence of the Lord has been in this place and this has made a difference to our minds and hearts. God's spirit is among us and within us right now. As one expression of our spiritual renewal, we are all now challenged to commit ourselves to generous giving during 2010. If you have never stepped out in faith to commit a proportion of your income to the Lord's work, I urge you to

try it and to take seriously Priscilla Oldaker's recent testimony that "when we give sacrificially, we can't out give God."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.