

File: FRT Offering as Worship 10/10/17 Text: Exodus 36:2-7

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

It's Sunday morning across America, people are arriving hours early for church. They've set back-up alarms and cancelled everything so they don't miss worship. All week they've been talking about what happened at church last week and they're checking their "Fantasy Church League Missions Teams" on their computers and have been watching up to the minute highlight clips on the Church News Network of worship services that have happened across the nation that day. You can feel the excitement building.

"Hurry" dad says frantically "We're behind again, get the SUV loaded". "But it's only 6AM" mom says "Church doesn't start for five hours." "Last time we left at this time (Dad says) we had to park blocks away from church and sit in the nosebleed seats. Someday I really want to sit in the front row."

The roads are congested no matter how early you leave. Cars are parked as far as the eye can see. Folks are tailgating in the church parking lot and the smell of brats and burgers is unmistakable and everyone is wearing a "Be a Happy Tither" hat. The masses begin filling the sanctuary and you can feel the electricity in the air.

Once the service starts everybody's on their feet. Fourteen guys have camped outside the church since Friday night so they can get a good seat. Even though it's freezing cold they're shirtless---each has a letter painted on their chest and together they spell out "GET YOUR TITHE ON". The rumor has gotten out that the pastor is going to preach on Biblical Stewardship and how the offering is an act of worship. It's one of the highlights of the year. Forty minutes into the message people start looking at their watches and whisper to each other "this is so exciting I hope the sermon on giving as an act of worship goes into overtime". Then do you know what happen? I woke up. By far the best dream I've ever had!

We're in that time of the year where we talk very specifically about one of our Biblically based core values at Servant of Christ---GIVING. Some say, **WHOA**, what's the deal, church is supposed to be about spiritual matters. Well, I am privileged to be the bearer of The Good News that nothing is more spiritual than how we use money! Money itself is neutral but how we use it or let it use us--has a tremendous impact on our lives of faith. How we use money is an important part of faith formation.

We talk a lot about faith formation here at Servant of Christ. Most people think of faith formation as something that happens primarily in Sunday School, Confirmation or High School. But the truth is our faith is always being formed the questions is what is it being formed into?

An important part of faith formation is understanding that we've been formed to worship The Lord and the offering on Sunday mornings is an act of worship—faith raising you might say ---not a break in the service to do fund-raising. I don't know if you've ever paid attention to the words we use, but either Pastor Melissa or I invite the ushers forward to “receive” the offering rather than “take” the offering. In other words it's an act of worship because it is given and received rather than taken.

Here are just a few passages that remind us that we've been created to worship and that an offering is an act of worship.

- Proverbs 3:9 “honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops
- Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also
- Acts 20:35 “remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said “It is more blessed to give than to receive
- 2 Corinthians 9:7 Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Imagine what it was like in our reading this morning. The Israelites gave so many offerings to build the temple that the craftsman said to Moses “The people

are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done. So Moses said to them “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.” Wow, not exactly like my dream but close enough and this wasn't a dream it was reality. Do you know why?—The Israelites understood that their offerings were an act of worship, not something to check off their religious “to do list”.

It can happen that when we start talking about our offerings as an act of worship people respond in one of three ways. One response is **UNDERSTANDING**: A person understands that giving is a joyful act of worship and their gifts are about giving back to God and getting to be part of God's handiwork in this world.

The second response is **CONVICTION**: This person gets that the offering is an act of worship and they want to take the next step in their life of giving but have yet to take that leap of faith. Conviction is a good thing especially when it becomes good motivation. A third response is **IRRITATION**: This person is upset that they had to sit through a message about giving in a church environment. There are a number of reasons for discomfort with talking about money in church but often it's just an unwillingness to discover what the Scriptures have to say and a lack of desire to follow.

So how do we move from seeing the offering as a break during a service to do some fund raising to seeing the offering as an act of worship and faith raising? Well sometimes God does that work in a person's heart and it's a miraculous transformation. But more often than not it takes a bit of work and focus on our part through which God works.

This summer I had two worship experiences within a span of two week that were about as polar opposite as you can get. Joan and I took a road trip. In New Mexico we stayed at a Benedictine Monastery outside of Sante Fe. As Guests you are invited to join the monks for worship. They spend about four hours a day in worship spread throughout the day. The first worship service of the day is at 5AM. **We skipped that one!** You go into the chapel and the monks enter in silence wearing black robes with black hoods. You literally feel like you're in a scene from a medieval movie. The worship consists solely of chanting and some of it not very good. Once I got over the setting of being in there it became readily apparent this wasn't my thing. But we committed to going to the different worship times.

Eventually I said I need to commit to this worship and make an effort. It was remarkable that once my attitude changed and committed to participating, the words of the Psalms jumped of the page and the worship became very meaningful.

Two weeks later I was in Manhattan visiting our oldest son Peter. We went to a church called Hillsong. They meet in an off Broadway theatre that held I would guess a couple thousand people. We went to their first service of the day at 10 AM. I was probably one of the 4 or 5 oldest people there. The music was good. There was basically a light show with a smoke machine behind the drummer. The people up front all had jeans with rips in the knees, not because they wore them out, they bought them that way because it's a "hipster thing". And one thing I am keenly aware of is that I'm not a hipster.

But after my experience at the Monastery I told myself, OK this isn't my thing-again but I'm going to really commit to making this worshipful. And guess what happened? Once I changed my frame of mind even the 45 minute sermon and some of the music (which wouldn't be my first choice) became meaningful. In both instances it took some work on my part.

Please don't get me wrong I'm not saying I had it all down but it was a real reminder that when we gather, if we have the mindset of it's "just going to church" it's awfully easily to sit back and wait to be either inspired or wowed and it becomes not much more than another form of religious entertainment.

However as I was reminded this summer if when gather we commit to worshipping something wonderful happens. Invariably we discover we do get

something out of it as we offer ourselves to God And the offering, yes even the offering becomes meaning as we understand it is a really important act of worship.

As the offering is received in a few minutes I invite you, some possibly for the very first time To be very intentional to see your offering as an act of worship and may God bless you as you move from just going to church to coming to worship! In Jesus name Amen!

Prayer...