



# Devotions

St. Mark's, Watertown, WI 2008 Capital Fund Appeal  
Pastor Jensen, Pastor Walther, Pastor Werner

## Day 1

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:26-28)*

We like to consider ourselves independent. We like to think we are our own masters. We like to think that what's ours is ours. We like the idea that we are owners of our own property.

It isn't so! Do you see what it says above? God owns the universe. He made it. God owns us. He made us. And God owns everything we've got. It's He who gave us everything we have. We rule underneath Him. We are managers of His property. And He's looking for us to operate faithfully.

So, how do you think He wants us to view Saint Mark's capital fund appeal? As another way that the church is looking to grab my money? Or is this my opportunity to consider whether the Lord has given me some of my resources for the privilege of building facilities where generations of young people will learn about Him? (even if it means reevaluating my priorities, even if it means making a change to my lifestyle, which has become too lavish).

What would lead me to give up my resources for Him like that? Christ Jesus – master of the universe and owner of all things! – He hung on a cross of wood He created, bleeding down upon ground that He made: so that I will inherit a part of God's estate in glory.

Don't you want to spend your resources sharing that message with others?

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Am I willing to consider Christ the owner of my property?
- 2) What is it that I am spending money upon which isn't serving Christ?
- 3) How am I going to arrange to turn that money over to His employ?

### Prayer

Jesus, owner of all things: thank You for buying me back from hell—and giving me Your resources for me to manage. Help me to manage all of them for You. Amen.

## Day 2

*In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:3-7)*

Our offerings to God at church do reflect the desires of our hearts, don't they?

True, the all-knowing Lord was perfectly able to read Cain's heart—and the sway sin had within it. Similarly, He certainly knew Abel's gratitude toward Him and his cheerful generosity.

But the state of their souls was reflected in their offerings also. Abel brought "fat portions" (considered the very best) from some of the "firstborn" (considered the very best) of his flock. Cain merely brought "some" of the fruits of the soil—not the first, not the best.

How about us? Do I bring the first of my money to the Lord: with complete confidence that the dear Lord will surely deliver to me the rest of what I need? Do I bring the best of my money to the Lord: with total trust that such generosity will not leave me and mine unfed? Or does God get the wrinkled leftovers?

Thank God that: when we had fallen short, God gave His first, His best, His only dear Son as an offering for us. Jesus' innocent obedience to His Father availed for you and me. His body and blood were worth the salvation of every soul, and are still delivered to us – wonder of wonders! – in Holy Communion.

And isn't it exciting to think that the Holy Spirit is using your cheerful and generous offering today to deliver that good news to children born tomorrow?

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Looking at your offering envelope, what would God's words to you be?
- 2) Reading your heart, as you prepare your offering, what would God see?
- 3) How necessary to a congregation are its buildings?

### Prayer

Savior, Jesus: I praise You for offering for me Your best—Your holy and precious blood, Your innocent suffering and death. Make me willing to die for You, and all the more to live for You—also giving to You cheerful, generous offerings. Amen.

## Day 3

*All the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." (Exodus 36:4-6)*

Unless you happen to be in the construction trade or the building industry yourself, doesn't it just amaze you? I mean: Could you locate, cut, treat, and fasten together enough wood to build your nice house? Could you dream up durable flooring, safe insulation, the electrical scheme, and a safe heating and cooling system? Could you develop the tiny electronic components that make all your handy gadgets work? Could you do it for an the kind of ministry expansion we're planning?

Since most of us can't, it's well worth compensating others who are able to help us in those areas. That's what we'll need to do for our building project at Saint Mark's School. Now, wouldn't it be great if we'd do as well as the Israelites above? When they put together the tabernacle – no small undertaking! – they brought so much they had to be ordered to stop! Actually, it must have been just a little disappointing for those who were still on their way to contribute.

Could anything like that possibly happen in our multi-million dollar capital project, whose financing we envision requiring many years to complete? Yes, it could be over very shortly! (With God, nothing is impossible.) It would take some amazing gifts, though. Do you maybe, personally have those kinds of resources? Could you really put them to any better use?

There was a time that God undertook an immense project—one which, it seems, should have taken an eternity of years to complete. He planned to pay for every sin of every soul who ever lived (and each one of those sins would land a soul in hell forever and ever!) But one amazing gift enabled God to accomplish the necessary payment in one single, very dark afternoon.

In view of God's Good Friday gift of Jesus, are you willing to make an amazing gift to him?

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Do you personally have a skill you can offer to our building project?
- 2) What net worth do you have? Can you make a large gift to God from it?
- 3) Besides this project, where must our church lavishly spend resources?

### Prayer

Precious Savior Jesus: How amazing is Your love! And how amazing is the kindness with which You treat us! Win our hearts each day, more and more, to accomplish amazing things on Your behalf—also with our finances. Amen.

## Day 4

***Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" ... and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.***

(Ecclesiastes 12:1&7)

“28,124”, twenty eight thousand, one hundred twenty-four—that’s how many days an average person will now live. (God is good!) If you’re in your twenties, though, some 9,000 of those days are behind you. If you’re in your forties, maybe 16,000 are gone. And if you’re in your sixties, well, you could have maybe 4,000 left. It’s sort of sobering!

When you get to the end of your days, what will you want to be able to say? As it says above, there would be nothing better than for you to be able to say, “I’ve served my Creator—and also with all my resources.”

When your Lutheran Christian great-great grandparents died, do you think they said (and probably in German!), “I’m sure glad I bought that horse”?, or “I’m sure glad I helped build that church”? (for the princely sum of \$23,000 in 1888). When your Lutheran Christian grandparents died, do you think they said, “I’m sure glad I invested in the stock market”?, or “I’m sure glad I helped build that school”? (for \$381,000 in 1957).

We modern members at Saint Mark’s have an opportunity that comes up usually only every several decades. And that’s the opportunity to do something visibly enduring and significant for our Savior. Consider the pleasure it will be, on the day of our death, to think that at that very moment children will still be learning about the very Jesus who is dispatching His angels to carry us forever to His side.

Death has a way of focusing our priorities, doesn’t it? Use your days to serve Him who spent His days preparing paradise for us for an eternity of days. His death made the forgiveness of sins God’s highest priority.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) For death: Is your soul ready? Are your resources lined up as you like?
- 2) In view of death: Do you have money you could direct to Christ’s work?
- 3) How do you think St. Mark’s History book will record our present project?

### Prayer

Holy Spirit: I adore You for using your Scriptures and Sacraments to prepare me for my death. Help me to prepare for the same all my resources, over which God has made me steward. Cause me, in all things, to live and die for Christ my Savior. Amen.

## Day 5

*This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'" – She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. (1 Kings 17:14-15)*

“Pastor, I’m an old widow. I don’t even know how I’m going to pay the electric bill when the company raises the rates. I don’t have any money for adding on to school.”

Already many months ago I heard those words. And I was sympathetic. The dear Lord gives a different set of finances to different people—and even to the same people during different phases of their lives.

So, how did I reply? I said, “Well, maybe your support of this project will be for you to pray very fervently for it. And pray for the Holy Spirit to reach the hearts of people who are younger than you, so that they do what you did when you were younger, and learn better to give to their Savior.”

But the above passage suggests what I added: “Maybe you’ll find you’ll be able to gather together a small gift every so often. And your Savior will smile, because He looks at your heart.”

After all, the widow of Zarephath had much less than any of us. Nevertheless (albeit with a specific and special promise from God), she ended up giving more than she had at the beginning. It’s encouragement, I suppose, that the dear Lord won’t ever let us contribute ourselves to death either!

Not that the Lord put the same restriction upon Himself.... The Lord Jesus did contribute Himself to death, He gave His absolute all with no supply left on hand, He spent every cell of His body: first of all, obeying His Father in our place, and secondly, laying down His life in our place.

So, despite debt from college, despite new mouths to feed, despite responsibilities for growing children, or despite a decrease in income, each of us can still boldly give to Him.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What special responsibility does your generation have for our project?
- 2) How will you encourage (grand)parents & (grand)children to participate?
- 3) Do you know any poor fellow members in whose place you could do extra?

### Prayer

Heavenly Father: I adore You for providing for me all that I need—and even much more. Change my heart, so that I provide to You all that You desire. Amen.

## Day 6

*Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.* (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Impossible! It must have seemed that way at first to Nehemiah and his fellow citizens. Rebuilding a couple of miles of walls, so crumbled that there were places the animal that Nehemiah was riding on could not get through, and lying in ruins for 140 years, without modern equipment, and under the imminent threat of attack by enemies—it seemed like an impossible task.

Impossible! It might have seemed the same way to our ancestors 120 years ago, when they undertook a \$23,000 church from wages of men who were making \$2 per day. It might have seemed the same a half century ago, when they constructed a \$381,000 school from people who were making \$1.75 per hour.

Impossible! Today's capital project may seem the same to us—who sometimes have struggled to balance the church's budget.

But do you know how long it took Nehemiah and men to rebuild that entire wall? 20 years? 10? 5? Surely a couple of years, anyway? No: 52 ... days!

How long did it take our ancestors to pay off our church and school? I don't know either, but it was probably quite awhile. I'm sure glad they undertook the project! Else, where would we worship? Where would many of the church's children (both in Saint Mark's School & in Sunday School) learn of their Savior?

Impossible—a right standing in God's sight really looked that way for you when you were born into the world. The product of maybe 250 generations of sinners, you were as wicked as any of them. But the cleansing words of your adoption – “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” – changed all of that for you. Jesus washed away your sins in Holy Baptism. God adopted you.

Won't he also likely accomplish the impossible again: for us, and through us?

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What “impossible” situations in your life has Jesus seen you through?
- 2) What amazing things has the Spirit done in our church's history?
- 3) Is the Lord using these to help you grasp your role in the present project?

### Prayer

Jesus, Almighty Lord, You have accomplished the impossible: my salvation! Make me confident to do amazing things for You. Amen.

## Day 7

*"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."*  
(Malachi 3: 10)

Ah, any discussion of stewardship will sooner or later treat the tithe. What was it? And does it have any application to us?

In Old Testament Israel, God required His people to give to Him the first one-tenth (a tithe) of their income. It went to support His work. And no, God has no such requirement for His New Testament people. Christ Jesus nailed to His cross not only our sins, but also all ceremonial requirements of the Old Testament law, and He crucified them all away.

So, no talk of a tithe any more, right? Well, not so fast.... If God's own beneficial requirement for His Old Testament people was a tithe, who are we puny people lightly to say, "Well, of course, that has no application whatsoever to us!?" In fact, wouldn't it be better to say, "If God required from His Old Testament people a tenth – and they had so few blessings compared to us, and they knew so little exactly regarding Christ compared to us – shouldn't we try to consider a tenth a starting point for our giving?" In fact, under Christ's command, still in effect – "Love your neighbor as yourself" – shouldn't we probably aim for fifty percent?!

"But Pastor, you don't understand, I can't possibly give a tenth of my income, at least right now!" Maybe not. And no faithful pastor would want to burden your conscience with a requirement Scripture does not apply directly to you anyway. But might you consider increasing your offering one percent per year until you get to ten percent (or even over it—which is easier than you think)? Maybe some of that could go to our capital project together....

Incidentally, the tithe was a firstfruits offering: a sort of a down-payment from God to God guaranteeing more income to come. Did you know that Christ's resurrection is the same? The Bible says the eternal life to which He has been raised is the firstfruits: the down-payment guaranteeing our resurrection to life in the future. Now that's a message worthy of spending money to proclaim!

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What percentage of income do you give directly to Christ?
- 2) What percentage do you think you should give directly to Christ?
- 3) How are you going to get there, step by step?

### Prayer

Jesus: You are one hundred percent God and man and Savior. Make me give one hundred percent to You—and the right percentage of it directly. Amen.

## Day 8

*"Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:30-37)*

Have you ever wondered why Mary wasn't rebuked for asking the question, "How will this be?" After all, Zachariah was for asking essentially asking the same question (Luke 1:18). Mary wasn't rebuked because she asked the question in faith, not wondering *if* God could keep His promise, but simply wondering *how* God was going to accomplish what He promised.

So here we find two miracles of the Holy Spirit revealed. 1) The Holy Spirit's miracle of the incarnation: *God becoming human to rescue humankind!* 2) The Holy Spirit's miracle of faith to believe it: *Mary trusted that all things are possible with God!*

Both miracles are ours as well. 1) The tiny baby born in Bethlehem is both our brother and our God, our Savior Jesus. 2) The Holy Spirit through Holy Baptism and His Word also has given us the faith to trust it!

We again see that faith trusts God's promises, even when they may seem impossible, "*For nothing is impossible with God.*" As we work through our capital fund appeal, just like Mary we trust in God's promises.

But, was simply trusting in the promises the end of it for Mary? No. There would be that upcoming difficult discussion with Joseph, perhaps the disbelief and scorn of her family, a rough trip to Bethlehem while very pregnant, a smelly stable as the surroundings in which she gave birth and first held her son and Savior, packing up in the middle of the night, living on the run, etc. Trusting the incredible promises of God wasn't the end of it. Trusting the incredible also meant doing the difficult.

It's no different for you and me. Through faith we receive the promises of God and are totally acceptable to God because of what Jesus has done for us. And, through faith we act on the promises of God. Is it easy to begin raising \$4 million dollars? No. But, trusting the incredible, we set out to do the difficult, for God's plan transcends all understanding.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What seems "impossible" with our campaign? Is it impossible for God?
- 2) What seems "difficult" with our campaign? Does it compare with the difficult things God has asked the saints of the past to do? (Mary? Joseph?) Is any of it too difficult to accomplish with the help and power of our Lord Jesus?

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, You rule over all things for the good of Your children. Like Mary, may I treasure the fulfillment of Your promises in my heart. Help me put those promises into action in my life. Amen.

## Day 9

*An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.* (Luke 2:10-20)

See the shepherds! By God's grace they experienced the same miracle as Mary: In faith they trusted the incredible. . . even before they saw it with their own eyes! *"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

Then, arriving at the stable, those shepherds' eyes saw something quite humble: a tiny baby. Still, faith looked beyond the humble sight and beheld God's incredible, transcendent plan! They saw their God come into the flesh to be their Savior! And, no matter how lowly the sight, they knelt before this child, their God and Savior!

Next, embracing their Savior who humbly came to save them, they responded in kind. They humbly accepted His purpose for their lives: *"They spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."*

Christ still comes to us in humble ways: a book, water, bread and wine. Yet, in faith we accept Him as He comes . . . for He comes to save! And, like the shepherds we too humbly accept Jesus' purpose for our lives, chiefly spreading the word concerning what has been told us about our Savior.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) How is our ministry facility expansion really something quite humble before the world?
- 2) How are our project and the Gospel Ministry at St. Mark's an embracing of God's humble purpose for our lives?

### Prayer

Savior Jesus, You continue to come to me in gentleness through Your Word and Sacraments, speaking to me tenderly with forgiveness and not treating me as my sins deserve. In response to Your love, may I humbly dedicate myself to You and Your purposes for my life. Amen.

## Day 10

*On coming to the house, they (the Magi) saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.* (Matthew 2:11)

Although they had not yet seen the Christchild . . . although they did not fully understand . . . the Magi set out on a journey of faith. Why? God had promised. No other reason was needed.

So they packed up the most precious gifts they could give. They traveled for months over hundreds of desert miles and when they reached the end of their journey what did they find? As they knelt and gazed upon their Savior . . . just like Mary and the shepherds . . . they were not disappointed.

As those Magi presented their gifts to Christ, did they wonder if the journey had been worth it? Certainly not. For as is always the case with faith, the length and difficulties of the journey are not worth comparing to the sight of Christ. Is it possible that they wondered whether the gifts they gave were too much? No, as is always the case with faith, they received more than they could ever give.

No matter what journey faith is called to make . . . no matter what gifts faith is called upon to offer. . . faith is never disappointed, for faith trusts in God and God never disappoints. One day we also will gaze upon Christ with our own eyes and gladly kneel before Him. In the meantime, we offer ourselves and our best gifts in worship of our Savior, always receiving more back than we could ever give.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What difficult journeys of faith has God asked you to take? How has He rewarded you through those difficulties?
- 2) What promises of God are we trusting as we set out to renovate and expand our ministry facilities?
- 3) When we see the completion of our school renovation and expansion, how will that sight be an encouragement to faith?

### Prayer

Holy Spirit, until I behold my Savior in heaven, grant me the eyes of faith that I may journey through life on Your path, never tiring of giving You my best. . . myself. . . my all. Amen.

## Day 11

*When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. (John 6:5-13)*

\$4,000,000 isn't chump change. It's a huge amount of money. What a dilemma! Not for the Savior who feeds thousands from a boy's small picnic lunch. Like then, today He still has in mind what to do and His plans transcend all understanding.

Like Philip we might focus on wages, the economy and the huge amount of money needed. But, like Philip we'd be wrong. Philip needed to focus on Jesus, the One whose hand opens up and satisfies the desire of every living thing.

Like Andrew we might make suggestions, thinking whatever we try, whatever resources we have, they won't be enough. Like Andrew, we again will be wrong if we forget that God can and will take our efforts and bless them for His own purposes.

What about that little boy? Is he someone with whom we can identify? He showed up that day to listen to Jesus. Then, when asked by Jesus for all he had, he gave it. That boy didn't worry about what he'd eat on the way home. He simply gave what he had.

What does God want us to learn along the way toward our goal? Like Philip do we need to focus more on Jesus and less on money? Like Andrew do we need to trust that God blesses the work of His children? Like the boy do we need to simply listen wholeheartedly and then respond wholeheartedly to Jesus? Along the way, Christ will bless. He already has in mind what He will do. His plan to bless us does transcend all understanding. And, just as He had in mind to bless with more than food on that hillside about 2000 years ago, He has in mind to bless us with more than a renovated and expanded building. He desires to build our trust in Him.

### Question to Consider

- 1) When you think about the monumental task before us, who do you feel most like? Philip? Andrew? The boy? Who does our congregation as a whole feel most like?
- 2) What spiritual focus do you/we need to ask of Christ?
- 3) Which is more difficult for Jesus, a) to feed thousands with a few morsels or b) open the hearts of hundreds of His people to give toward our future Gospel Ministry?

### Prayer

Dear Lord, grant me a heart that listens and responds to You. Take my efforts and make them Yours, for Your glory and for the good of Your people. Amen.

## Day 12

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:1-10)*

Imagine the thoughts that must have raced through Zacchaeus' mind that day: "Could Jesus really be the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah? If so, would He really know or care about a sinner like me?" All those questions were answered when Jesus stopped purposely right at the foot of tree in which Zacchaeus was perched, called Zacchaeus by name, and said, "I must stay at your house today."

In baptism and Lord's Supper Jesus deals with each of us personally and gives us the same answers: "Yes, I am your Savior. Yes, I know you and call you by name. Yes, I forgive you. Yes, I must stay in the home of your heart today. . .tomorrow. . .forever."

Like Zacchaeus, when Jesus invites Himself into our homes, we welcome Him gladly. For Zacchaeus welcoming Jesus into his home and heart also meant doing some house cleaning. It meant getting rid of the thing in which he had trusted . . . the thing he had made his god. . . money. Had Zacchaeus had big plans for all that money? I imagine. But, now none of that meant anything in comparison to his Savior.

Could it mean anything else for us? We cannot serve both God and money. Faith desires to daily sweep clean whatever might try to compete for lordship with our Jesus. Jesus in our heart and home means all that we have is offered and put in service to that most Gracious Guest of sinners. Like Zacchaeus, our security no longer depends on our bank accounts and portfolios, but on our Savior's care. Like Zacchaeus, our offerings reflect that trust and tell our family and friends that Jesus is our treasure and security. Like Zacchaeus, our plans for the money we have involve God's plan of saving souls . . . God's plan that transcends all understanding.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Do I sometimes forget how intimately Jesus knows me . . .my heart. . .my needs?
- 2) Do I treasure my *baptism. . .Lord's Supper. . . my personal devotion time. . .*as times when Jesus comes to me personally?
- 3) Have I responded to Christ as the Guest of my heart and home? Have I done it like Zacchaeus did? Have I done it financially?
- 4) What "house cleaning" do I need to do today that will make it evident to all that Jesus is my Gracious Guest?

### Prayer

Dearest Jesus, Gracious Guest, be my greatest treasure today. . .tomorrow. . .forever. Cleanse my heart and life that all I have may be put into service for you. Amen.

## Day 13

### *Quick Lessons from a Fish, a Donkey, and a Couple of Coins*

Jesus told Peter, ***“Go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”*** (Matthew 17:27)

What can we learn from a fish? Well, this short lesson obviously teaches us that Jesus is our Lord and in control of all things. Does He really need what’s in our wallets? After all, He can get it from a fish’s mouth if He wants.

That Jesus involves us in His work is therefore a sign of His love for us. He doesn’t need us, but oh how He wants us involved in His work. Wow! God includes me in His plan, even though He doesn’t need me! That’s a plan that transcends all understanding!

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Jesus told two of his disciples, ***“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”*** (Matthew 21:2, 3)

Whether it’s casting a line for a fish or asking for a donkey, the Lord Jesus will provide what He wants us to have. When compelled by His Word that we are asking for what His kingdom needs, we do not need to be shy about it. We simply ask, telling His children that their Lord has a need. Moving their hearts to willingly respond, that’s the Lord’s business. But, He will move them according to His plan that transcends all understanding.

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***As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”*** (Luke 21:1-4)

Here we have the classic example of giving from Scripture. Jesus teaches us that it’s not the size of the gift, but the size of the heart that He views. The widow’s gift of a few coins was a tremendous gift of trust. She gave all she had to live on. She knew *“man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”* With that offering she confessed that the Lord was her life and her provider. She neither needed nor desired anything or anyone else.

Is not the Lord our life and our provider? Do we not live tomorrow . . . next year . . . ten years from now . . . because of His blessing? Shall we (who have far more) not also give out of our poverty? What kind of gifts do we bring that confess that Jesus is our all . . . our everything?

### Questions to Consider

- 1) How can I “cast the line” for Jesus in order to catch what He has already provided?
- 2) Jesus is the One who moves people to respond.  
How does that help me ask others to help? To give?
- 3) If I were to do what the widow did, how large of a gift would it be? What kind of gift can I bring forth that shows the Lord is my life. . .my provider. . .my all. . .my everything?

### Prayer

Jesus, my Savior, You are my All, my Everything. You are all I desire and all that I need. May my life and gifts confess this truth. Amen.

## Day 14

*Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

(John 19:30)

Oh, perfect life of love! All, all is finished now,  
All that he left his throne above To do for us below.

No work is left undone Of all the Father willed;  
His toil, his sorrows, one by one, The Scriptures have fulfilled.

No pain that we can share But he has felt its smart;  
All forms of human grief and care Have pierced that tender heart.

And on his thorn-crowned head And on his sinless soul  
Our sins in all their guilt were laid That he might make us whole.

In perfect love he dies; For me he dies, for me!  
O all-atoning Sacrifice, You died to make me free!

In ev'ry time of need, Before the judgment throne,  
Your works, O Lamb of God, I'll plead, Your merits, not my own.

*Oh, Perfect Life of Love* by Henry W. Baker 1821-77 public domain  
*Christian Worship, Hymn 138*

**Truly this grace. . .this love. . .this sacrifice. . .transcends all understanding!**

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Have I contemplated Christ's great, dying love for me? Have I done it today? Do I do it daily?
- 2) To what love shall Christ's love move me? Today? Tomorrow? In this capital fund appeal? In my life?

### Prayer

Dearest Jesus, as You have sacrificed Yourself for me in love, in love may I be a living sacrifice to You, sacrificing all my wants and desires. As You have given Your all for me, may I give my all for You.

## DAY 15

*“And now brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”* (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

Children often take their cues from their parents. All of us have learned from the examples of others. We have learned good habits and bad habits from our parents and those who have influenced our lives. One good habit we can learn from others is the grace of giving. Often we don’t talk about our giving to the Lord, but we need to speak about this as an encouragement for one another.

As Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth he uses another Christian congregation’s giving as an encouragement for these believers. Paul uses the Christians in Macedonia as an example for the believers in the congregation at Corinth. What moved these people to give so generously even though they had very little? These people gave themselves first to the Lord. They knew what the Lord had done for them. They rejoiced in the forgiveness and eternal life they had through Jesus Christ. They knew that all the material things they had were from the Lord. They wanted to share them with others. They thought first of the Lord and His work rather than of themselves. Even Paul was amazed at what these people were willing to do.

We have had and still have people at St. Mark’s who are not what you would consider wealthy, yet they give richly and generously because of what the Lord has done for them.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What has God done for me?
- 2) How much can I give above and beyond what I already give to the Lord?

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, You have given me everything that I have. The most important treasure I have is the forgiveness of sins and eternal life because of Jesus Christ. As You have given me material blessings, help me to give generously and freely for Your work. Amen.

## DAY 16

*“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”*

(2 Corinthians 8:7)

Everyone strives to be good in something. As children we may have worked hard to be a good basketball player. We may have practiced long and hard to develop our shot or to be a good defensive player. Or we may have been gifted by God with musical abilities so we took up an instrument and we practiced and practiced until we could do the best we could with the musical gifts that we had.

Have you ever worked hard to excel in the grace of giving? Why would you want excel in giving? By nature we are basically selfish. It’s hard for many of us to give money away. Why would we want to give more of our hard earned money away?

Jesus gave everything He had, His life, for us. He did not consider what it would cost Him to rescue you and me from eternal punishment. His selfless giving is what changes our thoughts and minds on giving. His giving is what moves us to give.

As we strive to excel in the many things, we also strive to excel in the grace of giving.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What hinders me from excelling in the grace of giving?
- 2) What has the Lord done for me that helps me to excel in the grace of giving?
- 3) What plans can I put into practice in my life of giving to excel in this area of my Christian life?

### Prayer

Loving Savior, You gave everything for me. You did not hold anything back as You freely offered Yourself on the altar of the cross for my sins. Help me to continue to grow and excel in the grace of giving as I give freely and joyfully to You. Amen.

## DAY 17

*I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.* (2 Corinthians 8:8-9)

Most of us do not like to be told what we should give. In fact, when someone tells us what we should do, our sinful nature reacts and thinks, “You’re not about to tell me what I should do. I’ll do what I want to do.”

Paul does not command the Corinthian Christians as to what they should do. Nor does he command you and me what we should give. However, he says he wants to test the sincerity of our love. You say, “I love the Lord.” Talk is cheap. Your actions should indicate that you mean what you say.

Consider your Savior Jesus. He is God almighty. He possesses all power and dominion. Yet He gives that all up and comes to this earth to rescue a people who are often thankless and thoughtless. Because of what Jesus did we are rich. We possess the greatest wealth in the world. We have forgiveness for all of our sins. We have the freedom from guilt and the certainty of an eternal home in heaven.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Does my giving reflect my love for the Lord? Or am I just throwing the Lord the leftovers after I have taken care of myself first?
- 2) What is influencing my giving to the Lord?
- 3) Why doesn’t Jesus’ work for me lead me to be more generous and cheerful in my giving?

### Prayer

Savior Jesus, You did not consider the fact that You are God almighty a prize You had to hang on to. You willingly humbled Yourself and came to this world so that I might have the riches of forgiveness and eternal life. Help me to give as You have freely given to me. Amen.

## DAY 18

***Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*** (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

When you plant a garden and you just put in a few seeds, don't expect that you will get a lot of vegetables from that garden. However, the more you plant the more you harvest and enjoy. This fact also holds true in our giving. As we give cheerfully and generously the Lord blesses us.

The Lord does not force us to give. He sets the needs and challenges before us. We then in our hearts decide how we will respond. We do this not because we have been forced but because of our great love for the Lord Jesus and all that He has done for us and has given us.

So often we worry that if we give so much we won't have enough to take care of ourselves and our family. Remember the promise that the Lord makes to you. "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." The Lord will take care of our needs. We don't have to be afraid to give generously.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What is my attitude toward the church asking for more money for a capital fund appeal for our ministry facilities? Why do I have this feeling and reaction?
- 2) Why can I be a cheerful and generous giver?
- 3) Why do I have problems believing the promises of God?
- 4) How can I overcome my doubts and fears?

### Prayer

Loving Lord, Your promises are true and certain. Help me to believe those promises when it comes to my giving generously and cheerfully. Drive out the doubts and fears I have and help me to trust that what You say about my giving and Your blessings is also true. Amen.

## DAY 19

*“Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”* (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

It's easy to talk about giving. But when it comes to the mechanics of how I am going to do this, that's where the rubber meets the road. That requires a plan. It requires developing a way in which I am going to accomplish what I hope to do with the Lord's help.

Paul proposed a plan for the Corinthian Christians in their giving to help the saints in Jerusalem. He told them to set aside a specific amount of money on a weekly basis. This was not to be a last minute thing. It was to be planned ahead of time. How much? Paul says give in accordance to how God has blessed you. Some were able to give large amounts. Others were able to give small amounts. But each gift was important. It wasn't the size of the gift but that each person gave freely, willingly and cheerfully on the basis of how God had blessed that person.

As we embark on our capital fund appeal for ministry facilities, it is important that each of us sets aside a sum of money in keeping with our income, saving it up for this special project for our Savior Jesus and his lambs.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) How can I set aside a sum of money to save for my church's capital fund appeal?
- 2) Why do I want to set a certain amount of money aside?
- 3) How much should I set aside for this special project above and beyond my regular offerings?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, You carried out God's plan to rescue and save me. Help me now as I work to set up a plan in my giving for the facility needs for ministry at St. Mark's. Help me to faithfully set aside a sum of money regularly which is above and beyond what I regularly give for Your work. Use these gifts to help us provide the necessary facilities to train future generations with the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus. Amen.

## DAY 20

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”* (James 1:22-25)

At times it is easy to listen, but it is much harder to put into practice what we hear. James deals with this reality in his letter. He notes that we often listen to what God says, but then we fail to put that word into practice in our lives.

We hear what the Lord says to us about giving to spread His Word. We hear what he says about giving to help God’s people and others who need to hear the Word. We nod and say, “Yes, that’s important. We should be giving.” But then we do nothing about it.

The Lord promises us blessings when we follow His Word. Just consider the blessings we have when we trust Him that He does forgive us and has removed from us the eternal punishment we should receive for all our sins. We have true peace and lasting joy. So He also blesses us when we follow His Word in our life of giving.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) Why is it so easy to listen but not to put into practice what we hear?
- 2) What does God say happens when we follow and do His Word?
- 3) What blessings do I receive when I put God’s Word into practice in my life?

### Prayer

Faithful Savior, Your Word has changed my life. It has given me freedom and peace that is unbelievable. Help me not only to listen to Your Word, but also to faithfully follow it and conform my life to Your will. Amen.

## DAY 21

*“And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”*

(2 Corinthians 8:10-12)

It is easy to start something. It is much more difficult to complete it. Look at how many projects you have started and have never completed. Why? You got distracted. It seemed to take too long. Other things became more pressing. You lost interest. You forgot and went on to something else.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to complete what they had begun. They started with a bang and were the first to collect gifts for the saints in Jerusalem. Now that has been forgotten and they need to be reminded to finish what they began.

Our three year capital fund appeal will need to be before us on a regular basis so we don't forget and so we aren't distracted by another seemingly urgent project.

Jesus faced distractions as He worked to carry out our salvation. The devil and his own disciples tried to deter Him and have Him lose sight of what His real purpose and objective was when He came to this earth. Thank God that Jesus kept focused and completed His mission to save us all.

### Questions to Consider

- 1) What can I do so that I do not lose focus and forget my commitment to this capital fund appeal?
- 2) Why would it be easy for me to lose my focus and forget this project?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, I thank You that you were not distracted from Your plan of saving me and all people. As we begin this capital fund appeal, help to keep me focused and not lose sight of what we are hoping under Your blessings to accomplish. Amen.