

Matters of the Heart©**Matthew 6:19-34****November 12, 2017****Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

I love this time of year. Don't you? I have always loved the Thanksgiving holiday. Not just because the food is so very good – turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole. PUMPKIN PIE!

I love the harvest look in decorations. And I love to pause and really think about the blessings in my life – the many reasons I have to give thanks.

I also love this time of year in the church as we have this great opportunity to once again, dedicate ourselves and what we can give, to God. It is a joy to think about what we can give to help keep the ministry and mission of Christ's church vital and alive. When we give of our resources – our financial support, our time, our talents we are planting the spiritual seeds for the ministry now and for the future.

I believe that making a pledge of what I've prayed about, and felt led to commit to giving for the coming year, is a matter of the heart.

Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians that each person should give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but as you have made up your mind to give. That is, we carefully pray about it and look at what we can do and then step out in faith and do it. (2 Corinthians 9:7-9)

We make a commitment to God with total trust that God will help us and provide for us; with joy and gratitude. Paul says God loves a cheerful giver. We decide first from the heart – from our love for the One who created us and shows us constant mercy and grace.

Paul says that in our commitment and trust in God, God is able to provide every blessing in abundance, so that we always have enough of everything we need – enough to share abundantly with others.

Giving is a spiritual discipline that I truly believe helps us grow stronger and healthier in our discipleship. We are exercising our spiritual tools as we pray about it; as we make a commitment – a covenant with God; as we write it down, trusting that God will take care of us; and then as we that commitment week after week, month after month. We are growing in our faith as we do these things. We are putting God before ourselves and our material wants and desires.

Does that mean we can't have nice things or shouldn't have money for ourselves? I don't think that is the point. The point is that out of what we have been blessed with, we have generous hearts full of joy and love, and a desire to share that blessing with others and with the church that will continue to grow people spiritually – even after we are long gone.

Jesus says we should store up our treasure in the places that will last – like heavenly, Godly things. He makes a point of saying that when we store up our treasure here on

earth it is in danger all the time of rotting away (although I never have it long enough for it to rot); or it gets stolen by thieves and scammers.

Jesus indicates that giving is a matter of the heart. He says where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

Think about that statement a minute. I've heard it said many times and I've even quoted it many times, and have always thought that if you put your treasure (your money) into something, that shows where your heart is – where your passion is. And I do believe that is true.

But what if you give to the church and your heart really isn't completely in it. Does that mean you don't want to give to the church, or that you don't love the church? Of course not. I think we all love the church and probably wish we could give more.

But you might have doubts about whether or not you can get by, if you give generously to the church. It can be a huge leap of faith to give a portion of your income first and foremost to the church.

It can be a scary thing, especially for someone who might be doing it for the first time ever. (It can be rather scary for those of us who have done it for a while.)

So, could it work the *other way*? If you give to something *before* your heart is 100% in it, could it be that just that act of faith can pull your heart into it in a deeper and more passionate way?

I believe that is true as well.

Sometimes just doing it –

- making the commitment because I believe it's what God is leading me to do;
- being faithful in that commitment even when I have my fears and doubts, even when I think, as I drop that check into the offering plate of all the things I could use that money for –
- doing it month after month and seeing how God is in it; seeing how trustworthy God is in caring for me;
- observing the activity in the mission of the church –

Usually, it is in the act of consistently doing it that I begin to have more passion for the ministry; and I begin to want to be more involved in the place where I am investing so much.

Suddenly I realize my heart has caught up with where my treasure is! Suddenly, I discover that I'm experiencing deep joy as I am able to give. And the fear is subsiding.

I may still have those little bits of anxiety but they go away; they aren't so strong that I'm tempted to tear up the check before giving it. Or snatch it back out of the offering plate. My worries are dissipated because time after time things work out.

I also begin to find that I'm not as interested in all the material things I once was so excited about. I find that doing without some of it actually feels good. And that, in itself, is a spiritual discipline – not having to have as much stuff.

Jesus says not to worry about anything because the Father knows what we need and is watching over us. As we give, I think our eyes are open in a new way and we see how God is taking care of us.

You may be wondering how giving to the church could be compared with storing up treasures in heaven. Yes, the money you give pays for earthly kinds of things:

- It pays salaries
- It pays utilities
- It pays for paper and pens and computers and copy machines and crayons and books.
- It pays for advertising

Earthly kinds of things for sure. But think about how long this one particular church has existed! 158 years! That's a long time for one church to be at work telling the good news of God's love shown to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ.

That is a long time for pastors to preach God's Word at this pulpit; for Scripture to be read out loud; for bible studies to be taught; for children to be raised in the Christian faith; for baptisms and communion to be celebrated; for outreach ministries to be done; for shut-ins and hospital calls to be made in the name of the Good Shepherd.

If it weren't for generous givers who trusted that God would take care of them; who were stepping out in faith as generous disciples, this church would not be alive and active today.

When we give our treasures – and our time and use our talents for the church of Jesus Christ, we *are* investing in heavenly things.

Today, we have this opportunity – this privilege to give from our hearts – or at least to give out of our faith, out of love and gratitude for God, trusting that our hearts will follow.

Let us take a minute to silently reflect on what God has given us and to pray about what God might be asking us to do. Most of you have probably already filled out your pledge card. I know some have turned in your pledge cards already.

Maybe some of you forgot your card. I'm going to give a minute for you to raise your hand if you do not have a card and need one and then another minute to either write in your pledge or to reflect and pray about what you have committed.

Are you giving what you believe God is leading you to give of your treasure? Have you made a decision to perhaps raise it up a step? Perhaps you feel God is leading you to tithe a percentage for the first time; whether it be 10% or a smaller or larger percentage. Maybe you just want to give a certain amount. Every little bit or every big amount counts. Especially if you are giving out of love for God.

Do you want to give a little extra to help with this beautiful old building – this house of worship?

What about time? Have you prayerfully listed an amount of time you want to give? And do you have an area in the church where you feel passionate about serving – where you can use your talents?

Whatever you do, do it with love and joy, knowing it will be honored and you will be blessed, even as you are a blessing, believing that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

© Copyright 2017. All Rights Reserved.