

Haslett Community Church-United Church of Christ  
Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost & Stewardship Sunday- November 4, 2007

Scripture lessons- I Chronicles 29:10-19 & II Corinthians 9:1-8

WHOSE IS IT?

In this past summer's Scriptures and sermons we spent a lot of time with David. We remembered him as one of the Bible's most important characters, a man "after God's own heart", yet someone capable of doing both great good and great evil. In today's first Scripture we're with him again, this time near the end of his life.

He's been Israel's king for a long time. He started out as a simple shepherd boy with maybe a shepherd's staff, a slingshot, and a harp to his name. But during his royal reign he's led Israel into an era of unprecedented prosperity. Now he has lots of stuff.

One day, he starts thinking about the great house that he lives in. He starts thinking about the box that God lives in. He knows that God's house is a very special box, the Ark of the Covenant. He knows that the Ark has very special things in it- manna from Israel's time in the wilderness and the Ten Commandments God gave at Mt. Sinai. He knows the Ark is kept in a one-of-a-kind tent, the Tabernacle, and that access to it is strictly limited.

But the whole situation still seems wrong to David. It doesn't seem right that he, the king, lives in a grand palace while *the* great symbol of God's presence to his people is a mere box that's kept in a tent. So he says to God, "Lord, I want to build You a big, beautiful house. I want it to be to Your glory, not mine. I want it to be the place where people will go to remember Your greatness, Your goodness, and Your love."

God answers David, "No, you've been a warrior for too long. You have too much blood on your hands. I want your son, Solomon, to build my house." How would you feel if you were David? You offer something great for God, and for all the right reasons, yet God still says, "No." I might be tempted to sulk. I might feel like picking up all my marbles and going home.

But David doesn't do that. He says, "Alright, Lord, I'm not the one to build it, but I still have plenty I can give to help Solomon build it." David becomes so excited by what he still can give to God's house that he gathers all of Israel's tribal, military, and royal officials to let them know what he's up to.

Early in I Chronicles 29, he tells them, "So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver . . . bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble in abundance" (verse 2). David gives not just from the national treasury which he controls as king, but from his own pocket, too. He says, "I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it. . . : three thousand talents of gold . . . and seven thousand talents of refined silver . . ." (verse 3) David gives all that he can.

He then asks a simple question which opens the door to this story's central meaning. He says to his assembled leaders, "Who . . . will (also) offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?" Kings didn't usually act like that in a situation like this. In David's time, if a king wanted a major project done, especially if he believed that God or the gods wanted it done, he didn't ask for support. He commanded it.

The Egyptian Pharaoh didn't say to his people, "Who of you are willing to offer yourselves today to help build this pyramid?" The Pharaoh said, "I know you're willing and you and all of you, too. I know you are because I say so." But David doesn't command. He asks because he understands God's real intention for Israel. God wants them to give not by command because they have to, but freely because they want to.

I Chronicles 29, verses 6 to 8 then say, “. . . the leaders of ancestral houses made their free will offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king’s work. They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord.”

They *do* give freely. They all give freely, joyfully, and generously. Verse 9 says, “Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the Lord . . .” David says, “. . . I have seen Your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to You. O Lord . . . keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of Your people . . .” (verses 17-18). David and his leaders take genuine pleasure in giving to God.

We all have those moments, too- times when we give freely, joyfully, and generously to God’s purposes. Those are our best moments, and we know it, but we don’t always have them. Times often come when we struggle with our money and how to be with it. We think, “Lord, I want to give freely to You, but that part of me isn’t very big right now. I feel uptight about my money or ignorant of it or out-of-control with it. Let me know the least I can give to You so that You won’t be mad at me.” That’s not the place we want to be in our giving. It’s like saying to our mother as Mother’s Day approaches, “Mom, I love you, but what’s the least I can give you so that your feelings won’t be hurt?” That’s not the free and joyful spirit that we or God really want.

In today’s second Scripture, Paul says, “Each of you must give as *you* have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” The Greek word Paul uses in this verse is *hilarion*, translated as “cheerful”. We get our word “hilarious” from that same Greek root. Joyful, hilarious giving is the spirit God wants for us. It’s the one David and his people have in I Chronicles 29 as they explode with bursts of hilarious giving. How have they become so free?

The answer is in verse 10. David says: “Blessed are You, O Lord . . . Yours . . . are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; *for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is Yours.*” There’s the breakthrough for David and his people. They see that “all that’s in the heavens and on the earth is Yours, (O Lord)”. Embracing that truth frees them for the cheerful, hilarious giving they really want to do.

God’s the Owner. We’re the stewards. We receive gifts from God’s hand to manage faithfully on God’s behalf. Israel profoundly understands this truth on that great day and a glorious time is had by all. Sadly and laughably, they didn’t always get it so well and neither do we. The two-year old in us likes to hang on too much.

As adults, we know how ridiculous it is for a two-year old to insist on, “Mine.” Nothing we ever have at that age is ever remotely made or earned by us. It’s all so obviously given by someone else. Yet we still can get awfully attached to what we think is ours. Try to give something we have to someone else, and suddenly it becomes our favorite thing in the world. “It’s mine and you can’t have it!” It’s one of a two-year-old’s favorite chants.

We get older and bigger and this two-year-old mindset hangs on in sophisticated and subtle ways. As adults with lots of stuff, we easily think, “Hey, I have this because I deserve it. I have it because I’ve worked hard for it. I’ve earned it, so it’s definitely mine”- which is why David’s so impressive in today’s story.

He’s literally the king. He’s defeated Goliath, led the armies of Israel to victory over the Philistines, and brought his nation power, prestige, and wealth they’ve never known before. Yet he still says to God, “It’s all Yours, Lord. My throne, my power, my stuff . . . all these I have only because of You. I give back to You only what’s already Yours.”

The same is true for us. Everything we have comes from God, but the more we have the harder it seems to recognize this truth. The more we have the more tempting it is to believe that we have because we’ve earned, that we have because we deserve.

The CEO of a Fortune 500 company is driving along with his wife. They pull into a gas station, a rare full-service kind so that an attendant comes out to fill up their tank. The husband goes into the station's store to pick up a few things. When he comes back out he finds his wife in a rather animated conversation with the attendant. The husband gets back in the car and the couple drives off. The husband asks his wife, "What were you two talking about back there?" She tells him, "I know that guy. As a matter of fact, I used to date him. He used to be my boyfriend."

This is the first the husband's heard of this. He says, "Well, I bet I know what you're thinking now. After seeing *him* again, you must be so glad you married me, Mr. Success, instead of some guy who turned out to be a service station attendant." She answers, "No. I was actually thinking that if I'd married him, he'd be the Fortune 500 guy and you'd be working at a gas station."

None of us are self-made. It's good to be regularly reminded of that fact, which is one of the best things about today's worship. On Stewardship Sunday, we remember front and center that everything we have is a gift from God, that none of us are ever self-made. We remember that we're stewards of God's gifts on God's behalf, gifts meant to be used for God's purposes. We remember that the truest pleasure comes in giving hilariously to God.

Of course, the preacher's supposed to say that on Stewardship Sunday, but can we be done with it now? Not yet, because Matt and Keri still have something to say. They're a young couple who recently started giving ten percent of their income to their church and other godly causes beyond their family. They used to be skeptical that there could any real pleasure in that, but they've changed their minds.

They say, "For a long time we've said that we want God to be first in our lives, but what does that mean? Giving like this has given us a more specific instead of vague sense of moving in that direction. It's made giving for God's purposes our first thought instead of a last one.

"Seeing each of our dollars in the light of God's priorities has made us think more honestly about what we actually do with them. We spend, save, and give much more intentionally now—far less impulsively. We've lowered our credit card and auto debt to free up more for our saving and giving. We attend to the impact our investments have on the least of these in God's world.

"The amazing thing we've stumbled on in doing this is the freedom we feel now. We've lost so much of the worry, confusion, fear, and even panic we used to have about our money. Knowing how and that we can gladly give away 10 percent beyond our family has removed the burden we felt before of being trapped, paralyzed, even hopeless about our finances.

"Working together on our money in the light of God's wants has also made our marriage better in ways we never anticipated. We've become a lot closer. We've been able to help each other face and start to overcome some of the insecurities and self-centeredness we both have about money and possessions. None of it has come easy, but we have to say that it's truly been a pleasure. It's the pleasure of becoming more and more the kind of people we really want to be, people who give hilariously to what God wants.

I expect most of us have been in a store lately, so we know that Christmas is seven weeks away. A favorite movie at Christmas time is Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. Think of the hilarious pleasure portrayed in that movie's final scene.

George Bailey's in big money trouble. During very tough times, he's helped many other people with their money woes. Through no fault of his own— in fact, because of a wrong done to him—he's now in deep need. People come streaming into his house, saying, "George, here's some of my stuff, and it's for you. It's for *you!*" Even the officers who've come to arrest him give him money that will keep him from being wrongly put in jail. It's a scene of divine hilarity.

It's the same kind we mean to have here every Sunday when we give our offerings. We intend to have it especially today as we also start making our pledges to this church's ministry in the year ahead. Everything we have is a gift from God. As faithful stewards, we use our gifts for God's purposes. Freely we all have received. Now is the time freely and hilariously to give.

Kurt Kirchoff

We enter our Moment of Reflection to prepare for it. Putting God first, remembering all God's gifts to us, devoting them to God's priorities, what will we pledge in support of this congregation's ministry in 2008? That's the question the members and friends of Haslett Community Church are asked to ponder now.

After you've done so, if you are one of those members or friends and if you received a pledge card before this morning's service I encourage you to fill it out. In a few moments, Barbara and Kate will start the music of our Offertory. At that time, as you're then ready, please come forward and place both your pledge and, if you have one, your offering for today in one of the baskets on the table here at the base of the chancel steps. If you also have a prayer request for today, just place it in the basket on the stand to the right of the table.

If you're not ready to make a pledge, but have an offering and/or prayer request for today, you're also invited forward at that time to place it in the appropriate basket. Whether it's a pledge, an offering, or a prayer request each is an expression of our commitment to God in this place that our congregation gratefully receives. If you're not physically able to come forward to bring your pledge, offering, or prayer one of your near neighbors, I'm sure, will be glad to do it for you.

Let's prepare to give and to pledge through our time of silent reflection.

**BASKET**

**FOR**

**PRAAYER**

**REQUESTS**



