

**Sermon Luke 19: 1-10 Habbakuk1:1-5, 2:1-7 3:17-19 Nov. 4, 2007**  
**Holding On To God in Hard Times**

I am reminded by the children - on this Stewardship Sunday - about the power of children to teach us truth - Johnny and his Mom and Dad went to breakfast at IHOP, and then to Church. When the offering time came Johnny's Dad quickly put in a dollar bill - and - remember - any faithful gift is a good gift. But Johnny, in a too loud voice, said, "but dad, you tipped the waitress 5 dollars".

Two points - well - okay - 3. One I made - any faithful gift of whatever amount, counts for good. Two - don't tip God, the whole meal, all of life, is God's gift. But three - percentage giving is biblical - 10% then, and % is always fair - a percent of what ever by God's grace, we've been given. And I suspect, in Johnny's case, his Dad was a bit on the low end of being thankful to God.

But again - as you consider what God has provided you with at this time in your life, and how you can effectively give thanks through your Church, Remember that every faithful gift is a good gift.

Our stewardship process this year is straight forward. No fancy videos, no pony express. You have a packet in your hands - is there anyone who needs a packet? Please open it if you have not done so already ....

In the packet are these items - A brochure that reminds us of the rainbow of blessings that are ours by God's Grace - A Picture Presentation of next year's proposed Budget - A card that can guide us in making % or proportionate gifts - and this year, to meet the budget, we need about a 2% increase in giving.... If you were giving \$20 a week - that is .40 more a week. There is a faith commitment card for you to return - and this is very important for your officers in making plans to use every dollar given most carefully And an envelope for you to use to return your Faith Commitment - later this morning at the offering - or - we hope - by next Sunday, and no later than Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup>.

That's it. No knocks on your door. There will be phone calls made to be sure members have a chance to ask questions - but other than this morning - no one will be asking you for your faith commitment. That will be between you and God - and - yes - our financial administrator - Kelly Fish. And we thank you for your faithful support of the life and ministry of your Church - Past. Present. And Future. Let us join in our hymn.

Please pray with me - Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving and faithful people - be acceptable to you - and your good word to us this day in Christ. Amen

A dollar - the gift of a dollar - from a homeless man who had precious few dollars to his name. An almost nameless prophet, speaking in a time of moral mess, and ethical and financial distress... And a wee little man named Zacheus, up a tree in his personal life, and up a tree to see Jesus.

And these three are examples for me of what it means to hold on to God in hard times. And - yes we are facing some hard times in a war torn and aids affected world, and with a changing environment and its as yet unknown effects, though wild fires in the west and drought in the SE and Great Lake water levels raise disturbing concerns. And serious job, housing and financial issues in Michigan. Serious hard times are happening.

In his own hard times - war torn, morally a mess - Habakkuk the prophet sang a song about his misery - but also a song that became the celebration of his faith in God to sustain him ...

And in his day, Zacheus, rich in things but poor in spirit, and up a tree in his personal life, hung out in hope for what a holy man named Jesus might do for him. And the homeless man, grateful for small favors, gave a gift of thanks.

All - were hanging on to God in hard times in their lives. The prophet sang his faith - Though the fig tree does not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the lord. God is my strength.

The little rich man in the tree, rich beyond his deserving, went on to make public promises of a major devotion and donation to god's work.

The costly gift of gratitude by a person down, but not out of faith. People - holding on to God in the hard times in their lives.

And - And this table - with gifts of bread and cup - symbols of a life poured out in deep trust in, and love for God and for God's people .... A reminder to us of where to put our trust - where to invest our faith.

And All of these are examples for me of the risk of faith - trusting that God provides - always. And that holding on to God is the best of the bets we can make in life. And - yes - this Stewardship Sunday - the Faith Commitment Cards we now have in our possession... another sign.

The nation of Israel - long ago - in turmoil and at war, with no moral compass, pursuing pleasures but with no real purpose - does that sound too familiar? And the prescription for health? Hang onto God - be faithful to the one who has been, and is, and will be our hope and our salvation.

A little man, a big sinner, up a tree - whom God sees - and Christ calls him down - And he steps out to live again for God and for good.... Giving thanks....

And a homeless guest in our Church who, grateful, wanted to be part of God's people and God's work ... sharing a dollar .... A small gift to be sure, but on its face stating that man's faith - In God We Trust.

All - hanging on to God in hard times... hanging on to God when nothing else seems all that certain, and God does, And in our hands - our own signs - choices we can make - for God and for good.

Bread and cup. We take and share. A statement of our trust in God's care for us, for our deepest needs - forgiving our sin, holding out to us a way of life that leads to life larger than this life we know.

And - Faith Commitment Cards - one way for us to say to ourselves - that we are hanging on to God - And Our contribution to the good being done by God's people in the name of Christ, in this place.

Beyond our own strength, beyond what we can do with others, we remind ourselves of God's love and goodness to us, and we seek to share that goodness with others.

Not trying to make a budget - to pay the bills - as critical as that may be for the Church - but our faith commitments - are really statements of our faith in God. And our commitment to make God's presence known...Through support of those who lead our worship...And those who teach and encourage us to grow in faith understanding, and to open the eyes of our children and youth to the best ways of living.

Support of those who bring Pastoral care to us and to our families - our Parish Nurse - the Prayer Shawl Ministry - the Deacons caring work. Shoe boxes for soldiers, Rebuilding Together, and orphanages in Uganda and Honduras' and Cisterns of fresh water in Mexico... and food kitchens, and, yes, homeless shelters.

And all of this, all of this, not just in thought, but in deed, is our way of taking greater hold on God - who alone - Can hold us... through all the changing experiences of our lives.

God's love poured out for us in Christ - holding on to bread and cup - reminders of God's costly love for us. Symbols too of our love and care for each other.

And Faith Commitments - gifts from our hands - for the work of sharing God's love for us with others. And with the gifts we receive and share at this table, and the dollars and time we give to Christ's Church - we hold more tightly to the God who holds us forever in God's care. Amen.

Rev. David W. Robertson, Pastor