

Tithing to the Eternal Priest

Bible Verses Referenced: Hebrews 4:12-16, Hebrews 5:7, Hebrews 7:8, Genesis 14, Mark 10:35-45, Genesis 12, Psalm 46

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, which enlivens our hearts and our minds with the knowledge and love of Your Son, Jesus Christ. His Word is like a sharp, two-edged sword that pierces right to the core of our being and convicts the attitudes of our hearts and the thoughts of our minds with the knowledge and love of His will, your will.

So we ask that your preaching of Your Word would be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. One of the sayings that we say in church sometimes is, "The Lord be with you." And what do you say? And also with you, right? A lot of times we use that in worship services.

I've sometimes seen it used to quiet down parish halls where a lot of people are chattering and talking and just going all over the place. One time, one of the ministers got up and he was coming to the microphone and the microphone wasn't working. And so he kept saying, "The Lord be with you, the Lord be with you." And everybody was just kept talking and talking and talking. And then he got frustrated. One more time, the Lord be with you.

He said, "Something must be wrong with this microphone." And everybody said, "And also with you." Now, one of the things that you'll notice is that I actually don't use that phrase to quiet down crowds, and the reason why is actually because it has a very worshipful meaning and significance.

One of the reasons why we say that, and it's an exchange that has been happening in the Christian church all the way back to the beginnings of the early church. But one of the reasons why we say that is because when we come into the worship service of the Lord, it's actually Jesus' liturgy. Jesus is the one who is leading this worship service.

It's His presence, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, who is speaking to us through His Word, who is drawing us into His presence through the holy sacrament of His body and His blood and the bread and the wine. So, my role as the pastor or the priest in this case is actually just a physical representation of what Jesus is doing in the worship service.

That's why when we just read the gospel, I didn't say, "Listen to me," you know, "Deep Thoughts" by Charlie Holt. You didn't hear that. A reading from Charlie. What did I say? The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and everybody didn't say, "We're ready to hear you, Charlie." But you said, "Praise to You, Lord Christ." And so, in the very back and forths that we have, we actually are acknowledging that it's Jesus who is speaking to us through the gospel, that His Word is alive and active.

And so when I say, "The Lord be with you," and you say, "And also with you," what you're saying is that the Lord is in you. And I am recognizing that when the body of Christ is assembled in this space and time, this holy space and time on a Sabbath, that Jesus is present with us in His people as the great high priest of His church.

And so, everything that we are doing in this space and in this worship time is unto Him as the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, but also as our priest, who is the one drawing us into the presence of the living God. We're in the midst of a stewardship season and we're talking about giving and pledging and that kind of thing.

And the book of Hebrews actually talks about tithing, and it does so in reference to this enigmatic figure named Melchizedek. Jesus is described as being a priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek. I'm so glad that you pronounced his name correctly. I've heard him pronounce Melchizedek, which is not Melchizedek. He's Melchizedek.

But who here is very familiar with the ministry of Melchizedek? Anyone? A couple of people in the back. Melchizedek is spoken about three times in the Scriptures. In Genesis chapter 14, Melchizedek

is the person that Abraham tithes all of his spoils to. And it's very interesting. Abraham celebrates with bread and wine.

In other words, he has communion with Melchizedek, and then he gives him a tenth of the spoils of his victories. So he's mentioned there. He's mentioned in Psalm 110, which is a Messianic Psalm where King David says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand. Today you will become a priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek.'" And he's speaking about the Messiah.

When the Messiah comes, he will be a priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek. And then the writer of Hebrews is the third place that you read about Melchizedek in the Bible, in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the book of Hebrews. So, here's the first point. When we are giving of our tithes and offerings, it's not so much that we're giving to the ministry of St.

Mark's Episcopal Church or the institution of the church or to keep the building up or the lights on or anything like that. Our mindset must first and foremost be that when we are paying and giving our tithes and giving our offerings, not so much to what, but to a who. That we are tithing to our high priest.

We are tithing and giving to our high priest who is in the order of Melchizedek. Now, who is this Melchizedek and how is it that we are applying this to Jesus? The Scriptures say in Hebrews chapter 7, "This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and he blessed him.

And to him, Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. That's what it means to tithe, is to give a tenth. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is the king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, He continues a priest forever. So the writer of Hebrew is actually saying quite a lot there about this Melchizedek.

First of all, just think about his name. It comes from an etymology in Hebrew of two words put together, Melek and Sadek, which is king and righteousness. And so Melchizedek is the king of righteousness or the king of justice. He is the king over a particular city, the city of Salem, which we now know as Jeru Salem. So this is the king of Jerusalem that Abraham is interacting with.

The Jerusalem means "city of peace." And so the writer of Hebrews says that Melchizedek is both the king of righteousness and the king of peace. And then he goes on to say, "Now, this is a very interesting thing about Melchizedek. He doesn't have a genealogy where everybody else in the book of Genesis has a genealogy.

The implication being that it very much could be that like the theophany that Job is encountering in the reading that we had from Job where God appears to Job in a whirlwind, that Melchizedek could very much have been a pre-incarnate Jesus. That when Abraham tithed to him, he was tithing to Jesus in a pre-incarnate form as the king of Jerusalem and the king of righteousness and peace.

He has no beginning nor end. He's just there for that moment and then gone. And what does he celebrate with Abraham? Communion. Very interesting. And so we have several little bits of information about him, but the point that the writer of Hebrews is making is that when Abraham tithed, he tithed to Him, this greater figure.

And that when we are giving in the context of our worship services, we're not giving to a dead institution or to human beings that are mortal and going to pass away, human priesthoods and this sort of thing. But we are giving to the living one, the one who, like Melchizedek, has no beginning or end but to His eternal priesthood and His eternal ministry.

It's quite profound when you think about it that way. These offerings that we put in the plate or now we have QR codes that we're scanning are holy, holy, holy offerings made to the Holy One. So secondly, what are we giving when we give, when we tithe? Well, what the Bible encourages us to do, and it does this over and over again, and in the book of Hebrews really reinforces this.

Last week, we talked about we are to enter into the Sabbath, the Sabbath of God. So on one level, the Lord asks us to give Him back one-seventh of our time. We are to work six days, but one day of week, we are to wholly devote and dedicate to Him. Not to football. Though, football is great.

I'm not against football, but we are to give our time into devotion and worship to Him. Now, that can be a sacrifice sometimes, can it? Because there's a lot of things that put demands on our time, including our children and our families, and our work, and our need for rest and vacations, and these kinds of things.

But what the Lord asks for us is He has given us this incredible creation to enjoy and to work with our hands, and so on, but work six days and enjoy me for one. Enter into my presence with a seventh of your time. Then He asks for a tenth of our income to be returned back to Him. A seventh and a 10th.

Now, I first started trying to be more literal and giving a tenth of my income when I was in seminary, when I wasn't making a lot of income. I have found over my life that it's much easier to give a tenth of your income when you don't make a lot of money than when you make a lot of money. And I learned this very early on.

I was putting I'd get a little check from work or somebody would donate some gift to my seminary and I'd put \$10 or I'd give \$100 and I'd write these checks to the church. And then somebody had a matching gift from his company to a scholarship fund for me, and I received all at once \$10,000. The hardest check I ever wrote was a check for \$1,000 to the church.

And I'm like, "This is-- I shouldn't be giving this away. I need this money. All of a sudden, my brain was saying all of these things, but I was trying to be obedient." I'm like, "Okay, I'll do it." Wrote \$1,000 check. I fell in love with this girl named Brooke Edgerton, and I went to my mother-in-law and I asked her for Brooke's ring size.

And she goes, "What are you planning on marrying her?" I was like, "Well, I was kind of just asking for the ring size." I was like, "Well, the only reason why you'd ask for that is because you're planning on marrying her. You need to talk to her father first. When can we get together?" And I had to go to lunch with her and then with Brooke's dad. And the thing that Mrs. Edgerton wanted to know was, "Here I am a poor seminarian, and how am I going to support her daughter who has been raised in a different kind of manner than the one that I was representing?" And I said, "Well, you know, the Lord always provides for me.

He's always seemed to be, "Just give me whatever I need." And Mrs. Edgerton says, "Money doesn't fall out of the sky, Charlie." I said, "Well, it kind of does for me." She goes, "Well, it doesn't for me." And so later that week, this was so awesome of God to back me up. What is that? You say your hummingbird mouth and your alligator mouth and your hummingbird rear end?

But I got a check, another \$10,000 check my grandfather had sold his fish camp in Edgewater and distributed some inheritance to the entire family. And I got this big check in the mail. And the first person I went and took it over to was my future mother-in-law and shoved it in her face. And I said, "Look at that." She goes, "Well, I guess money does fall out of the sky for you.

Guess you can marry my daughter." But, you know, as we've gone through life, we have always tried to be faithful to tithing. And I don't want to say that to you with pride, because there have been a lot of years where we haven't. And I have found, again, that as we have even made more and more money over the course of my career and my ministry, that the expenses have increased sometimes faster than the income.

Children are super expensive. I don't know if you know that, but they are really expensive. And right now, you know I've got two in college and giving away 10% is really tough for me, especially after having done a wedding this year as well. This is what the writer of Hebrews is getting at when he says, "You know, the human priests and pastors, they minister with understanding because they know what it's like to be people of ignorance and weakness.

But we don't give because of my example, but we give out of the example of Jesus Christ." James and John were walking on the road with Jesus, and they're full of bravado, and they say, "Hey, can you give us whatever we want? What do you want?" Well, when you get into the glory into the big time, can we sit at your right hand, at your left?

This is a very worldly way of looking at things. We want to be in the power and in the money and in the success when you get there, Lord. We want to be right there with you at your side, getting all the good stuff. Jesus shakes his head, "Oye, you guys don't know what you're asking. To sit at my right hand or my left is not for me to decide, but my Father in heaven." But let me just tell you something.

You are going to go through the things that I am going to go through. You think you can be baptized with the baptism or drink the cup that I'm going to drink? You will do that as my followers. But that doesn't mean life is always going to be easy or full of material blessings and riches and wealth. This is a sinful and fallen world. And he goes on to teach them that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

So whoever wants to be greatest must become last, and the Son of Man did not come to lord it over people like the Gentile rulers, like the politicians of our day even, but He came to give Himself as a ransom for many. So in order to go up, you got to go down. You want to be great? You've got to be sacrificial and give of your very life for the sake of Me and My kingdom.

This is a tough lesson from the Lord, but this is the message of our great high priest who suffered everything that we suffer, even to the point of death, in order that He might understand the challenges and the difficulties of giving our all for His kingdom and walking the walk of faith unto Him. He knows how hard that is and how challenging it is.

He's able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but He has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. We have a great high priest. And so we give a seventh and a tenth because He's given 100% for us. His very life is a ransom for our lives. So then the last point is that we give because we are blessed to be a blessing.

And that what we are giving is actually to a ministry of blessing and life. In Genesis, when Abraham was called, he was told by the Lord, "I will bless you and you will be a blessing." This principle of being blessed to be a blessing is right at the core of what it means to be a follower of God. God says to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever dishonors you, I will curse. And through you, all the nations of the world will be blessed." One of the reasons why we tithe, why we give is actually to be a conduit of God's grace and blessings. We are blessed abundantly by the Lord. He has given us everything that we need for our lives and for godliness and to get through this crazy world. He has given us all of it.

And so we just give out of the abundance of what He has given to us with that Spirit, with that attitude. Hebrews 7:8 describes the difference between giving to the old order of things and the old institutions of the Jewish sacrificial system versus giving to the church in our day and age, giving to the Lord.

Tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one whom it is testified that he lives. The Levitical tithing was to priests who were going to die, to institutions that were on their way out. But tithing to the Christian church is tithing to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, which means tithing to that which will last for eternity.

There is nothing of more value and worth that you can give your dollars to and your time and your talent and all the who you are than to the ministry of life in the person and work of the Lord of life, Jesus Christ. We are blessed to be a blessing.

And what the plan of God is in this crazy and mixed-up world that we live in is that through us, the church, the resurrected body of Christ on earth, we will bless the families and peoples of this world.

And so as we become recipients of God's grace and mercy and abundance of life, we channel that through us, through the resurrected body, out into mission and ministry of the world.

I want to end by drawing you back to the bulletin. Can you pull this out with me? I want you to turn to the back panel of the bulletin, which says number six down at the bottom. I want you to see the vision and mission statements of our church. These are statements that I believe to the core of my being represent us well as a community of faith.

That we are a church that is built as a missional church at the headwaters of the gospel, meaning we are at the spring of the well of life with the gospel of Jesus Christ right at the heart of who we are. This is where our community is built at those headwaters of life and light, where Christ can flow to us but then through us out into our community, our city and world.

Psalms 46 is all about the river of God that makes GLAAD the city of God and the people of God. And that's what we have the privilege of being as the worshiping body and blood of Christ, of the bride of Christ, is that we get to partake of the source of life and light and share that with others.

The mission statement, why don't we read this together to cultivate generations of servant leaders rooted in God's Word, nurtured by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to the world. You know, Jesus said to James and John that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That's the controlling verse actually that grounds our mission statement in the gospel. And that's our calling, actually, as the people of St. Mark's to take that servant leadership role and raise up generations of young people, young and old, to live into that way of the Lord, so that we might nurtured by the Holy Spirit, enlivened by the presence of the active and living God, take the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great salvation out into this world.

I can think of nothing more important than the fulfillment of these vision and mission in our life. To give life not only to ourselves by receiving the life of God and Jesus, but to share that life as servant leaders out in this world that desperately needs the very life that we have been entrusted with.