

# Lutheran Christian Giving Is Systematic

October 27, 2019

Pastor Tom Ford

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

Reformation Sunday

## John 8:31-32

[31] Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;

[32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

## 1 Corinthians 16:2

[2] On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and store it up, as you may prosper, so that offerings need not be made when I come.

## **Dr. Martin Luther**

"People go through three conversions in the Christian faith: their head, their heart and their pocketbook - unfortunately, not all at the same time!"

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ.

Have I ever told you about the time Dr. Martin Luther stopped preaching? For the first four months in 1530 he stopped preaching, after having preached 200 times in 1528 and 121 times in 1529. On 40 days in 1529 he preached twice! And he never preached less than an hour! And the congregation stood for the entire service which usually ran between 2 and 3 hours. There was no heat in the winter. And there was no microphone and no PowerPoint slides! Why did Luther stop preaching for the first four months of 1530? Dr. Fred Meuser, former President of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, tells us in his book Luther The Preacher. "In 1529 [Luther] had warned the congregation [at Wittenberg] several times that he would stop preaching unless there were more fruit of the gospel among them. He told them they were selfish and miserly." "I am sorry I ever freed you from the tyrants and papists. You ungrateful beasts, you are not worthy of the Gospel. If you don't improve, I will stop preaching rather than cast pearls before swine." Read his Happy New Year to them in 1530. The text is the circumcision of Jesus. He started out calmly enough:

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***For us he put himself under the law, to free us from the power of sin, so we may live in obedience to the gospel. Christ alone is the fulfiller of the law. All of your comfort, life, righteousness and joy are in Christ . . . Believe that firmly. Then at once good works will follow - thanksgiving and praise of God and service of the neighbor with all one's property and goods. Those who do not give to a brother are not pious. In times past people gave for temples and altars, now everybody scrapes everything together for himself. There is nothing (going on) but scraping and scratching! But in two years the Turk will be at your door. Just don't think you are safe. If you were pious you would accept the word, trust God, do good to the neighbor and take heed to your calling.***

That is exactly what he said they were not doing. He warned the shameless self-avengers who fill the streets at night with weapons and swords that if they don't willingly keep the peace (they) will be forced to keep it! Watch out that you do not fall into God's vengeance. He compared the congregation to Capernaum in Jesus' time and lamented over them in language like that in Jeremiah 20:

***The time will come when you who now have an abundance of preaching... will long for a single sermon. But your impudence is so great that you have no appreciation for preaching... I am unwilling to preach (to you) anymore....I would rather preach to raving dogs because there's no use doing it with you and it is offensive to me. So I shall leave preaching to the pastor and his assistants. I will stick to my lecturing.***

In letters, he mentioned their ingratitude, lack of any self-discipline, firing of guns under his window, hardheadedness, shameless dress, adultery, profiteering, and thievery. And the ones who didn't do those things just laughed at the ones who did! Worst of all was their drunkenness, which he called the great vice of "us Germans." There was even swilling and yelling in the taverns at the very time of the worship services. Wittenberg was full of the gospel, but only a minority received it. If they didn't want to hear God, they would have to hear the devil. Instead of the glorious joy of being freed from God's wrath, the people sought the freedom of the flesh. They were proud of the gospel, but there was nothing behind it.<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther had come to Wittenberg in 1508 to teach at the new Wittenberg University. The scholars report that when Martin Luther arrived in Wittenberg in 1508, he was struck by the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Fred Meuser

<http://joelbrondos.worldmagblog.com/joelbrondos/archives/009123.html>

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large numbers of beggars looking for handouts on the street corners. He didn't like it one bit: Why should some people be so poor that they were forced to humiliate themselves in this way? Anyone who read Scripture, he held, should understand immediately that God didn't tolerate a situation in which some people had more material possessions than they needed while others went hungry. And so he acted: Luther called a meeting of the town council to address the situation of growing poverty in Wittenberg, made worse by an economic downturn.

The deliberations resulted in a city ordinance that outlawed begging and established a tax that would make it unnecessary. The law required that funds be collected from the citizens based on their resources and held in a "common chest." Four stewards of the chest, deemed to be well-acquainted with people's needs, had keys. Three keys were needed to open the chest's three independent locks. "The only criterion for distribution of loans or outright gifts was to be the need of the recipient," says church historian Carter Lindberg in *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Fortress, 1993).<sup>2</sup>

Martin Luther believed Jesus' words and tried to live them. He tried to continue in Jesus' words. He wanted more than anything to be Jesus' disciple.

Martin Luther was also a student of The Apostle Paul and believed that the Apostle's writings were instruments of The Holy Spirit to help us continue in Jesus' words and to help us remain true to Jesus' discipline.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth: "On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and store it up, as you may prosper, so that offerings need not be made when I come." (I Cor. 16:2)

Because of Jesus' words and the help of The Holy Spirit through the writings of The Apostle Paul, Luther realized and taught something that is crucial for our understanding of Christian stewardship: giving is to be systematic.

In St. Paul's day, most people were paid on a day-by-day basis. Since Sunday worship had already begun by the time of Paul's writings, on the first day of the week is one way of saying: when the Body comes together, give.

We believe and try to practice this. Give regularly. Give systematically. As you receive your income. We do this because giving regularly is good for us and it is good for the Church.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Paul Wee, [The Lutheran](#), November 2001.

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You wouldn't think of giving money to the power company when you find time to get around to it. What if Hill Avenue Grace tried to pay our telephone bill once every year?

Giving systematically means giving regularly and with predictable discipline based on the needs of The Lord, not on our personal whim or convenience. The man to whom Jesus sent the disciples to ask to borrow the donkey gave it for his use because The Lord had need of it then. Not later. Then!

I don't know if you are aware of this, but Hill Avenue Grace has a link on our website called "Donate." It is an automatic withdrawal program that enables you to set it up with your bank for a set amount to be transferred automatically each month from your account into the church's account. If that would help you to be more systematic in your giving, speak to a Council member and tell them you'd be interested.

Lutheran Christian giving is systematic. It is to be this way because God's giving is systematic for us. As we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and forgives us. Not later. Right now! As we forgive each other, God forgives us. Not later. Right now! As we come to the altar and receive Him by faith, Jesus comes into our hearts to live in us and help us be his Broken Body and Blood for the needs of others. Not later. Right now!

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Not later! Now! And the promise is renewed each day!

God is systematic in giving for us. God calls us to be systematic in our giving for the coming of God's kingdom on earth. It is fundamental, basic Christian stewardship. A very important way we continue in Jesus' words and show ourselves to be his disciples.

If you are not now practicing systematic giving, not just of money, but also of your time and talents, I encourage you to begin. The Lord needs your money, your time and your talents on a predictable, regular, systematic basis.

You know that the Muslim religion is growing phenomenally throughout the world. But did you know they teach and practice Zakat? "Zakat is the compulsory giving of a percentage of a Muslim's wealth. Zakat is the compulsory giving of a set proportion of one's wealth to charity. It is regarded as a type of worship and of self-purification. Zakat does not refer to charitable gifts given out of kindness or generosity, but to the systematic giving of 2.5% of one's wealth each year to benefit the poor."

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Muslims teach that “The benefits of Zakat, apart from helping the poor, are as follows:

- o Obeying God
- o Helping a person acknowledge that everything comes from God on loan and that we do not really own anything ourselves<sup>3</sup>
- o And since we cannot take anything with us when we die we need not cling to it
- o Acknowledging that whether we are rich or poor is God's choice
- o So we should help those he has chosen to make poor<sup>3</sup>
- o Learning self-discipline
- o Freeing oneself from the love of possessions and greed
- o Freeing oneself from the love of money
- o Freeing oneself from love of oneself
- o Behaving honestly

The 2.5% rate, they teach, only applies to cash, gold and silver, and commercial items. There are other rates for farm and mining produce, and for animals.”<sup>3</sup>

Christians do as well when we are as disciplined and systematic in our giving.

Now before I end this sermon, you should be asking, “Well, did Martin Luther ever start preaching again to the people in St. Mary’s in Wittenberg?”

The record shows that “In 1531 he was back to 180 sermons-one every two days. When on the road, he was always pressed into the pulpit by hosts and friends. Not that he wasn’t tempted to quit on other occasions, but the Scriptures, he said, overcome the temptation because they constantly testify to the God who still has not gotten tired of loving the fallen world and calling in back to himself. If he is tireless in his love, he shares that tirelessness with us or restores it when our disillusionment has driven it away. Luther remained a preacher of the gospel, not because he had been too pessimistic about Wittenberg or the world, but because God loved the people still, because only the word of both judgment and grace could help them, and because only God is to determine when the proclamation of the gospel is to cease.”<sup>4</sup>

Until that time arrives, the Gospel, **the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ**, is to be

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/zakat\\_print.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/zakat_print.html)

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Fred Meuser, Op. Cit.

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given from the pulpit and from the altar and from each of our hearts regularly and systematically.

In The Name of The Father, and of +The Son, and of The Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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