

Second Sunday in Lent (Stewardship 2)

March 1, 2015

1 Chronicles 29:14-18

The LORD God Fills Our Hearts and Hands for the Grace of Giving

Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ,

They will not be quite the same in opulence, our new addition and Solomon's Temple. They do have one thing in common, the main thing in fact. God's people build their houses of God with resources we give from hearts loyal to our LORD God. Like King David and his subjects, we offer our resources for construction "willingly and with honest intent."

Who is the source of those abundant resources for our giving toward the building up and upkeep of our ministry facilities and activities? Why would God give so generously to us who are so unworthy of his generosity? King David asks and answers those questions. David's answer applies to more than our new construction. It applies to our ongoing use of every resource God entrusts to our stewardship.

The LORD God Fills Our Hearts and Hands for the Grace of Giving. We do not deserve to receive such generosity. We have willingness to give generously.

I mentioned last Sunday that we are not in want like the widow in Zarephath. We have been able to commit and offer weekly and generously to our Lord. God had blessed David and the people in Israel with abundance also. They were able to give generously to the construction of the first Temple because the LORD God had filled their lives with generous amounts of gifts.

These gifts included gold and silver but much, much more. They offered their skills in carpentry, masonry, in working with fine cloth, in engraving. Some of them offered their strong backs and legs to carry materials. Please remember that stewardship is more than the use of money. It is the use of all those things Dr. Luther mentions in his explanation to the First Articles, "*I believe that God created me, and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.*"

Our text is part of King David's prayer before "the whole assembly" prior to the start of building the Temple. This was an assembly of all the leaders in the country. The people followed their example in participating. David knew the source of all the available resources. "LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your holy Name comes from your hand and all of it belongs to you."

What makes this all so amazing is that we do not deserve to receive such generosity. David confesses, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope."

David was speaking from the heart and his own experiences. May this be our recognition and admission. We are not God's people through natural holiness that matches his holy nature, or through perfect obedience of his commands. We are strangers to God because of sin. We are not his people but foreigners to him. Our lives on earth are short and not so sweet because of sin and in ourselves we are without hope.

The Holy Name of the LORD God stands for his reputation especially his promise of forgiveness of sins. That promise would come forth regularly from the Temple through the offerings and sacrifices the priests offered there. The leaders and the people wanted that promise among them. They willingly and with honest intent sacrificed all they were and had so the Temple would be there.

We have willingness to give generously. It is only the gracious generosity of God for the sake of our Savior, Jesus Christ that opens God's hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. We do not deserve the Lord's generosity, especially the forgiveness of our sins. Our will to continue to dedicate ourselves and what we have to the Holy Name of our God comes from that forgiveness of our sins.

We were at one time not God's people but now through the gracious call of the Holy Spirit we are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household.

Christian stewardship is not so much about the fruits as it is about the tree. David included this thought in his prayer. Jesus' ancestor acknowledged the changeless continuity of the promise of his grace in the Savior. We believe and confess this succession of grace. "LORD, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you."

God tests our hearts and is pleased with integrity. He is pleased with integrity in our Christian stewardship because he created it and keeps it alive through the Holy Spirit. Faithful Christian stewardship is not about bigger sacrifices although they appear. The proper management of First Article endowments is about bigger spirits and bigger hearts. It is about the bigness of God love, and God's big gifts to carry out big plans for his Holy Name.

Who are we to be able to do these things? We are nothing of ourselves. We are able because through the gospel the Holy Spirit keeps these desires and thoughts in our hearts and keeps us loyal to him. We can give generously because we have received God's generosity. We have willingness to give generously, and will remain loyal to God as he endows us with a generous faith. This generous faith comes solely by the Father's generosity of Jesus' cross on Golgotha, and the empty garden tomb.

I will close this morning with the verse just before our text, "Now our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name." Amen. <SDG>