

1 Chronicles 29:10-20 (The Message)

David blessed GOD in full view of the entire congregation:

“Blessed are you, GOD of Israel, our father of old and forever.

To you, O GOD, belong the greatness and the might, the glory, the victory, the majesty, the splendor;

Yes! Everything in heaven, everything on earth; the kingdom all yours! You’ve raised yourself high over all.

Riches and glory come from you, you’re ruler over all;

You hold strength and power in the palm of your hand to build up and strengthen all.

And here we are, O God, our God, giving thanks to you, praising your splendid Name.”

“But me—who am I, and who are these my people, that we should presume to be giving something to you? Everything comes from you; all we’re doing is giving back what we’ve been given from your generous hand. As far as you’re concerned, we’re homeless, shiftless wanderers like our ancestors, our lives mere shadows, hardly anything to us. GOD, our God, all these materials—these piles of stuff for building a house of worship for you, honoring your Holy Name—it all came from you! It was all yours in the first place! I know, dear God, that you care nothing for the surface—you want *us*, our true selves—and so I have given from the heart, honestly and happily. And now see all these people doing the same, giving freely, willingly—what a joy! O GOD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep this generous spirit alive forever in these people always, keep their hearts set firmly in you. And give my son Solomon an uncluttered and focused heart so that he can obey what you command, live by your directions and counsel, and carry through with building The Temple for which I have provided.”

David then addressed the congregation: “Bless GOD, your God!” And they did it, blessed GOD, the God of their ancestors, and worshiped reverently in the presence of GOD and the king.

There is profound joy in committing ourselves to God and God's purposes. How do we live out this joy in our lives and in the life and future of St. Andrew?

We began this series with the people’s celebration that the time had finally come to build God a proper house, to finally do right by God (see 1 Chronicles 29:1-9).¹ We saw how the people, following King David’s lead, opened their hearts and their wallets, pouring forth gold and silver and iron and bronze in vast quantities for building the temple in Jerusalem.

Our Scripture reading for today picks up with verse 10 of 1 Chronicles 29. Amidst all the celebrating, David steps forward to offer a prayer on behalf of the people. David first praises God and thanks God for all that God has given them, for it is God and God alone who has given them the wealth needed to build a proper temple. As David puts it in his prayer, *everything* comes from God and God is ruler over *everything*. As the child’s prayer so succinctly puts it: God is Great, God is Good . . . let us thank him [fill in the blank].

“She works hard for the money”

Donna Summer got it right – we work hard for the money. It is only natural that we would feel possessive about it. You can bet that all the Israelites gathered for the celebration in Jerusalem had worked for their money too, as had their parents, their grandparents, and all who came before them.

Nonetheless, based on the Israelites’ willingness to step forward and give such vast sums, it King David expresses his own feelings and those of all the people when he says, “Everything comes from you; all we’re doing is giving back what we’ve been given from your generous hand.”

¹The Sermon Background Study for the first week in this series, October 14, is available for download at www.thebibleacademy.com, as are all the studies I’ve written – all 270+ of them!

In his commentary² on the book of Chronicles³, Leslie Allen notes that David's thanksgiving prayer "wrestles reverently with the paradox that one cannot give to God, who is the prior giver of everything." Allen quotes C. S. Lewis:

"It is like a small child going to its father and saying, 'Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.' Of course, the father does and is pleased with the present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good in the transaction."⁴

It isn't the sixpence trinket that pleases the father, it is the love and desire that the trinket represents. The father doesn't need another doodad or tie, it is the child's heart that the father desires.

Looking for Joy in the Right Place

I don't know that there is a better word to describe the life I seek than a life filled with *joy* – the joy of a loving relationship with God, with my wife, with my children and family, with my friends, with all of you at St. Andrew. The joy of a job well done; the happiness of purpose and fulfillment. The celebration of all that is good and wonderful. This is what I seek, but such joy can be so hard to find! I need reminding that the search for joy must begin in the right place.

What is church? Why are there churches at all? Is there a church because we need organizations that can bring people together to worship, to minister to one another, to study, to serve, and to do mission? Is the church defined by what we do as we seek to accomplish God's purposes? In other words, is the church the means to an end . . . or is the church the end in itself?

Simon Chan, a professor at Trinity Theological Seminary in Singapore, helps us to see that the church, the larger body of Christ of which St. Andrew is one small part, is not merely an organizing tool. He says, "The church does not exist in order to fix a broken creation; rather, creation exists to realize the church. To be sure, the church's coming into being does require the overcoming of sin, but that is quite different from saying that the problem of sin is the reason for the church's being. God made the world in order to make the church, not vice versa."¹

"God made the world in order to make the church." Think about that for a minute. To put it another way, God made the world so that God could form a people to love and who would love God, even at the cost of his own Son. It staggers my heart and it humbles me.

continued in the p. 3 text box

1. from Mark Galli's article, "Stopping the Cultural Drift," in the November 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*.

Our giving to God is a bit like that, though not entirely. The work of God's kingdom often moves forward because we contribute our time, talents, gifts, and service. The temple in Jerusalem was not going to get built by magic. The people needed to roll in the wheelbarrows full of gold and iron and timber. And they had to put their hands and backs to work to build the temple. And they had to devote on-going tithes and offerings to the temple's use and maintenance. In that sense, God does need "our" time and our "talents" and "our" money.

God certainly knows that we work hard for the money. And, further, God knows that our desires and anxieties cause us to cling tightly to our wallets. Thus, even though we bring to God what is already God's, it expresses, or at least ought to, the love and joy in our hearts. As Paul wrote, God loves a cheerful giver. The father in Lewis's example would rather just keep the sixpence than fork it over to a child who would only begrudgingly use it for a gift rather than a candy.

A joy-filled heart

Our tithes and offerings do enormous good. They are necessary to our work as we build for the kingdom of God. But it is our hearts, our joy-filled, thankful, and humble hearts that God desires.

As God transformed my own heart, my giving went from a sense of obligation to an expression of joy and gratitude. And in turn, the giving has increased my own joy still further. I have received far more than I have given. It's like a package deal. All working together in a grand calculus of grace and giving. It is a matter of the heart, for a life of service and giving to our Lord will be a life of joy and celebration.

²from Allen's commentary in *The New Interpreter's Bible*.

³Chronicles 1 & 2 are actually one single, albeit lengthy, book. The same is true for the book of Samuel (1 & 2 Samuel) and the book of Kings (1 & 2 Kings). There is no such case in the New Testament. There, 1 and 2 Corinthians are two separate letters as are 1 & 2 Thessalonians and 1 & 2 Timothy.

⁴This quote is taken from C. S. Lewis' famous book, *Mere Christianity*.

Looking for Joy in the Right Place (cont.)

The church does not consist of buildings, not even the beautiful sanctuaries such as our own. Rather, the church consists of all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. When we rise each week to recite the Apostles Creed and affirm our belief in “one holy catholic church,” we mean the universal church, the body of Christ – to which all Christians, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, belong. God had once dwelt in the temple of Jerusalem, but, beginning at Pentecost, God dwells in and among his people. It is the people of God themselves who are joined together in Christ, a new creation and new humanity, growing into a holy temple, the temple to which God has returned. What a remarkable claim we make, that God’s very presence dwells in us, the church – the people of God.

For twenty-one years, there has been a congregation called St. Andrew in the holy, universal church. For twenty years, we have been on a journey, understanding that God created us to be his. We are a large community and we have all the blessings and challenges that come with size, but we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not merely an organization. Rather, we, as the body of Christ, are the very presence of Christ.

We are a growing and dynamic community of faith, marked by a welcoming warmth that we cherish and nurture. This has been made possible by a committed and generous congregation that has always understood there is joy in giving. Our current stewardship campaign will again demonstrate these giving hearts.

Thus, this place is where our search for joy begins. The church, not a mountaintop, is the place of joy and hope. It is here, in the fellowship we share with God and one another that we can ground our lives in the joy and hope of being God’s beloved.

READING WITH HEART & MIND, NOV 4 – 11

Sunday, 2 Samuel 1 1 & 2 Samuel are really one long book. Thus, 2 Samuel 1 picks up right where 1 Samuel 31 ended – and the political intrigue really begins. Why does David order the death of the Amalekite? Why do you think that David mourns for Saul? What does David’s lament say about Jonathan?

Monday, 2 Samuel 2 David is made king over Judah, but Abner, a commander in Saul’s army, makes Saul’s son, Ishbaal, king over all the Israelites except those from the tribe of Judah. The united kingdom of Saul is divided. What will prove to be a seven-year struggle for the united throne begins.

Tuesday, 2 Samuel 3:1-21 Ishbaal offends Abner, who decides to betray Ishbaal and come over to the side of David. How would you compare the covenant that Abner makes with David to the covenant between Jonathan and David? What’s your opinion of Abner and all his dealings?

Wednesday, 2 Samuel 3:22-39 Abner, the betrayer, is now betrayed and murdered. This is the first of seven murders in 2 Samuel. Joab is at least partly responsible for three more! Note that through all this David’s innocence is highlighted for the reader; e.g. verses 36-37.

Thursday, 2 Samuel 4 Now, two men try to please David by murdering Ishbaal and bringing his head to the king. But the king is as displeased with them as he was with the Amalekite and they meet the same end. Why do you think that people fail to grasp David’s unwilling to embrace vengeance on Saul and his family? Also, note the story of the five-year old, Mephibosheth. We’ll get back to him later.

Friday, 2 Samuel 5 David now assumes the throne of the united tribes. He conquers Jerusalem and makes it his capital. Zion, the city of David, is on the current site of Jerusalem. God leads David in battle against the Philistines. Further, God is the military strategist and David listens. What portrait of David is emerging from these stories?

Saturday, 2 Samuel 6 With great joy, David and the people bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Poor Uzzah, who was only trying to support the ark, is struck dead. He isn’t be punished by God. He is ritually unprepared to handle the holy ark, a bit like the people being unable to even touch Mt. Sinai in the story of the Exodus. The holiness of God cannot be safely “handled” by the unholy. See also 1 Samuel 5. Finally, why does Michal despise David?

Sermon Notes

Higher Choices – Finding Purpose through Spiritual Gifts

A one day workshop with Laura Zuber, Saturday, Nov 10

Begin now to build a successful life that honors God and takes you on a wonderful journey of loving, laughing, growing, creating, and experiencing all of God's blessings. Higher Choices™ are the wisest, best choices for you to be consistent with God's will for you and the life God's enabling you to co-create. They are the points at which you and God connect, and you decide to follow. Learn practical tools for self-discovery and action to know your destination, chart the course, and navigate life's twists and turns.

This Saturday workshop with Laura Zuber will be held on November 10, from 9-2. Lunch will be provided. To register, please go to www.thebibleacademy.com. Childcare is available and reservations can be made when you register for the workshop.

This Wednesday!! Diane Ackerman at 7pm in Wesley Hall

Ms. Ackerman will be the second best-selling author coming to St. Andrew. Her latest book is *The Zookeeper's Wife*, a true story about husband and wife zookeepers of the Warsaw Zoo who save 300 Jews from the Holocaust – hiding them in the zoo!

She will speak at 7pm in Wesley Hall and a book signing will follow.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

This is the week we come forward to bring our financial commitments to God and God's church for 2008. It is a time to reflect on where we are in our journey toward Christlikeness and, specifically, what we do with the money that God has entrusted to us.

1. What is the story of your own giving? Perhaps you are like me, in that for many years my giving to the church was out of a sense of obligation. Perhaps you have experienced a transformation in your giving, like my own, so that you now joyfully embrace it as worship. It's never easy to talk about money, but you might share some of your own stories. What do they have in common? Where is God in these stories?

2. Re-read C. S. Lewis' example of the child asking for sixpence. How do you personally reconcile the paradox of our giving to God what God has already given to us? Do you really feel that God has given you all that you have? I think it is actually a difficult challenge to embrace such a view. We do work hard for what we have! How do we come to see that when we speak of our money, we need to put quotation marks around the "our"? Is it something to figure out or is it a matter of the heart? What can we do to cultivate a renewed and transformed heart, helping the transformation to take root and to flourish?

Transformation is not just an event, it is a process.