

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

October 18, 2009

*Making Visions Happen, Part 1*  
2nd Corinthians 8: 2-4

Rev. Rusty Butler

When I was growing up, every fall my Dad would take my brother and me out hunting for Snow Geese. Neither one of us were good shots, but I think he appreciated our company. We would drive around eastern South Dakota looking up into the air or across the bare fields or over the numerous lakes looking for the Snow Geese who would come through on their annual migration south. Huge flocks of birds would come through. Thousands and thousands of birds. No one ever knew exactly when the birds would come through, but it happened every year like clockwork. It is the same with sermons on church finances!

Every year about the same time in the fall you can go to churches around the country and you'll hear some sermons on church finances.

There are many different approaches. Some of them are offensive. There are some that say give and you will financially prosper. Many of the televangelists use that approach. Makes me sick. The Bible never promises that. Oh, it talks about the blessings of faithful giving but it never says you are going to get to go on a shopping spree. That's just stupid.

Some churches appeal to those interested in tax incentives. Give to get a charitable deduction. Well you know you do get that, but that shouldn't be the reason you give to a church to get a tax deduction. For goodness sakes.

A few will try the guilt method. If you don't raise your giving we'll only be able to operate four days a week instead of seven. Or, if you don't give we're going to have to cut staff. What? Oh man.

Some pastors like to travel down the humorous road takes a little of the sting out.

Samuel Clemens, better known as "Mark Twain," who it is reported was once on a train car with a member of the Church of Latter Day Saints, a Mormon...back in the days when some members of that church practiced polygamy or multiple wives. The Mormon was bragging throughout his journey about how great it was to have more than one wife. In fact, he insisted that Solomon had many wives. There is nothing in the Bible that forbids having more than one wife, he said. Mark Twain replied, "I may not be too well-read in the Scriptures, but I seem to recall a passage that says, "A man cannot serve two masters."

Sometimes the sermon is around the issue of tithing. I'm a supporter of that. I think it's important to move toward that in your giving. But so often pastors who preach on that claim it is so easy. Mmm...can I tell you something? I don't think so. But I can tell you what making a decision about giving a percentage to the church will do for you. It takes away a question each week. Hmmm. What should we give to the church this week? No, we don't need any more decisions we have to make. I like the idea of figuring out how much you are going to give and then give it.

Why do we give to the church? Why do you give? Why do you bring your offerings?  
Do you know?

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Two ladies were worshipping at a church for the first time. The time came for the offering and the plates were passed. The first lady reached into her purse to retrieve some money. The second said, "Oh no, I'll get this one. You got the bus fare over here today!"

Do we know why we give?

I think there are some reasons why we give.

I think we give in order to express gratitude. It might be gratitude to the church for providing a place to come and learn and serve and be more spiritual. It might be gratitude to God (however you understand that word). We give out of gratitude. Some of you are like that.

Another reason is that we give to be involved. Your offering says something about what you are about. It makes the proclamation to yourself mostly that church means something to you. I hope we give because something in the church has caught our eye or warmed our heart or stirred our minds.

And we give in order to grow. I'm not talking about growing in terms of numbers or growing just to have a bigger budget. I'm talking about giving to grow our hearts.

I think that's what Paul was telling the church in Corinth. He'd been up to Macedonia that is northern Greece. He'd seen poverty but the church took up a collection "in their poverty" he said. They took it up for the church and the people in Jerusalem who were struggling. "They voluntarily gave according to their means," Paul said, "some even beyond their means for the privilege of sharing in the ministry with the saints."

Do you know why you give?

To express gratitude, to be involved, to grow as a faithful follower of the one who called us to more life.

Amen.