

A pastor friend of mine told me about what happened at his church a couple of weeks ago on Commitment Sunday. Commitment Sunday is what we celebrate today when you have the opportunity to share your financial pledge to Allison Creek Church for 2012. We will be doing this as we collect the morning offering. My friend told me that a few months earlier the second biggest financial giver to their church had stopped attending services at their church. He was mad at someone on the church staff so he and his wife no longer attended services or made any financial offerings. That was a couple of months ago.

So my friend was surprised when he noticed this member sitting in the sanctuary on the Sunday that folks were invited to bring their financial pledge for the church. My friend wondered to himself if this person was in worship that day in order to make a good faith effort to show that he wanted to reconcile and resolve the conflict and move forward. That is what my friend hoped.

It is the tradition in my friend's church for folks to bring their financial pledge forward at a point in the service. And so when it came time for folks to stand up from their pew and walk forward with their pledge, the disgruntled member made a noise to draw attention to himself and then turned around and walked out of the sanctuary in the opposite direction. It was obvious that this disgruntled member wanted folks in that church to know that he was not giving any more of his wealthy estate to that church and he wanted to draw attention to his decision.

Today is going to be the last Sunday we read from the Exodus story. Can you believe that we have spent 14 weeks on this story? I hope that reading through the Exodus story has made it more real for us. To see that it is not a series of unrelated events but a real story of real people facing real challenges.

We have read of how God's people were in slavery, how they were led out of slavery, how God led them toward the promised land through the desert and providing them resources for food and water. We read how Moses was given instructions that we call the Ten Commandments to share with the people but they became scared while he was gone and convinced Aaron to build a golden calf idol for them. God became angry and wanted to wipe them out but Moses said, "Don't do that God. Your reputation is on the line."

So up until this point, the Israelite people have disobeyed God, Aaron disobeyed God, God told them that God wasn't sure if God could go along with them because they were so stubborn. And yet, in spite of all of this disobedience, this is what happens next.

Read Exodus 34:1 -This time Moses has to make the tablets. The first ones were made by God. This new copy has to be cut by Moses. There are consequences for disobedience. But God provides new rules to live by. After giving Moses these new rules, we move to this final text that I want to read.

Exodus 35:1, 20-29; 36:2-7

Today you are invited to bring your pledge card forward. Don't give an offering or a pledge based on whether or not you agree or disagree with the pastor. Don't give an offering or a pledge based on whether or not you like the way this building is used. Don't base the amount you give by whether you agree or disagree with the leadership of this church or presbytery or denomination.

Because if our decisions on what we contribute to this church is based on our judgments, then we are like that man that I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon who believes that his money is exactly that, his money. But instead remember the ending of the story of the Exodus. God had every right to wipe the Israelites off the face of the earth for the way they disappointed God. But God chose not to.

God forgave them including Aaron who was anointed a priest. The one who built a golden calf was anointed a priest. The guy who built the golden idol is anointed a spiritual leader.

And because God showed so much grace to them, the people responded by building a church with their gold, silver, and their bronze. The ones with the skill of construction built the structure and the ones with the skill of knitting created linens.

All of the Israelite men and women whose hearts were touched brought anything for the work of the Lord. And they were so giving with their offerings that Moses had to finally say to them, we don't need anything else. Stop being so generous.

I pray that we here at ACPC are so thankful for God's grace in our life that one day we too will be told. You can stop giving now. You have given more than enough to do all the work. AMEN.

-Exodus 34-40

-Given: November 20, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)