

# Consecration Sunday

Luke 21: 1 – 19

Preached by Dr. Cahill

Babcock Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 13, 2016

The word consecration means dedicating or giving your life to a person or cause greater than yourself. Consecration is a recurring theme in the scriptures. In the beginning there are stories of the patriarchs and prophets in the Old Testament and later the saints and apostles of the New Testament, consecrating or giving themselves to God.

The word “give” appears in the Bible 2,172 times. That’s more than words “believe,” “pray” and “love” combined!

We can give ourselves to God only because God gave himself to us first.

The assigned gospel lesson this morning comes from the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of Luke’s gospel. Keep in mind this story took place a few days after Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and a few days before his crucifixion on Good Friday. His days were numbered, but instead of going off by himself to fret, Jesus stayed in the temple.

Knowing his crucifixion was near, these last days had to be tense and lonely. Then unexpectedly, something wonderful happened giving Jesus some measure of joy. After watching the rich and powerful lineup to place their contributions in the offering box, Jesus noticed a poor widow throwing in two copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

A study was done showing the higher a person’s income, the less is given to charity. Conversely the lower the income, the more is given.

Apparently affluent people are less generous giving sacrificially to worthy causes while poor people are more generous.

What do these findings suggest? We can only speculate, but here’s a guess.

Since poor people can’t place their security in what they don’t have, they look elsewhere. Forced to live paycheck to paycheck, they learned to trust in God’s provision. God’s proven track record results in the poor’s’ generous stewardship.

What causes less giving from people with more disposable income? Many would argue, the more you possess the more your possessions possess you.

Wasn't that the problem of the rich young ruler Jesus told to donate all his wealth to the poor? He was sad and walked away because he trusted in money more than he trusted God. Remember, money isn't the root of all evil, it's the love of money.

A lot of people, rich and poor, never join a church because they got the idea the church only wants their money. I once had a conversation with a man who said it was obscene to interrupt worship every Sunday to take up a collection. I tried telling him passing the plate is an act of worship and what we give is a barometer of our commitment to discipleship.

Many preachers tend to be embarrassed talking about money until we remember Jesus constantly talked about money.

Look at his parables about the lost coin, the three stewards who were charged with managing their master's wealth and the man selling everything he had to buy a field where he found the precious pearl. Jesus wasn't embarrassed to broach the subject, so why should we?

Jesus also preached about the pros and cons of wealth. I already mentioned the rich young ruler who couldn't part with his money. There was also the story of Zacchaeus who gladly gave all his money away after experiencing Jesus's unconditional love and affirmation.

Jesus also targeted the wealthy Pharisees and Sadducees who stood by and did nothing to alleviate the suffering of people living in poverty.

Jesus taught our quality of life isn't determined by being satisfied with what we have but being satisfied with what we don't have. As they say, "less is more."

When you think about it, the occasional stewardship sermon is really no different than weekly sermons about becoming one with Christ by giving your time and energy helping your neighbor in need.

On the other hand, people afraid to give sacrificially tend to be timid and unhappy souls who living "lives of quiet desperation." They fear future calamities beyond their control are just around the corner. On the other hand, people who experience sufficient faith fight off paralyzing fear. Their trust in God's empowers them to laugh at the time to come.

When God's kingdom finally comes, everyone will use their long forks to feed each other. Until this happens, people of goodwill are called to consecrate themselves to live generously. What do I say in the benediction every Sunday? "You've been treated generously, so live generously." That's what Christian stewardship is all about, living generously.

Last Sunday the Outreach Team gave you two opportunities to be generous to people who can never pay you back. You were asked to give generously to the Haitian Relief Fund and the Towson Assistant Center's Annual Thanksgiving Basket Drive. On top of that, you were asked to give generously to the Deacon's Fund, which helps people in community with financial needs. In just a few weeks, you'll again be asked to be generous by giving Christmas presents to the children living under the poverty line who attend Pleasant Plains Elementary school.

In Deuteronomy read, “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded to the poor...”

This command is one of the laws of Moses. We usually think of the Law being thick with rules and regulations that no longer apply to Christians. Then we have this command to be open handed to the poor.

Living in the covenant community, the early Israelites were commanded to look after everyone, even those outside their family and circle of friends. The individual’s covenant wasn’t just with God. It was also a covenant with their neighbors.

Later the prophet Micah reinforced this commandment. “What does the Lord require of you but to do it justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)

Consecration Sunday is the ideal time to ask yourself, “What is God requiring of me? Am I generously giving my time, energy and treasure to the reconciling ministry of Christ in this place.”

Last week you received a letter from the session entitled, ‘New Beginnings: Healthy Enough to Change.’ With the help of our presbytery we are beginning a process that will dramatically change the direction of our ministry and mission. Our goal is put flesh and bones on our mission statement, “Bringing Christ to People” by redirecting our resources outside our four walls.

So far the New Beginnings Team has been having conversations with a seventy of our neighbors. By the grace of God, we are slowly but steadily earning their trust. Our hope is to partner with them to make a difference in the quality-of-life in the Loch Raven Village and Knettishall communities. If all goes according to plan, early next year we start working together on a project we all agree on.

As you know, the New Beginnings Team is entering uncharted territory and with help from above, we are moving in the right direction. God is up to something and we are excited about reimagining our future.

Now more than ever, your financial commitment is needed. We still must pay salaries, utility bills and maintenance costs. These expenses are necessary, like buying tires for your car. If we don’t pay them, we can’t go where we need to go. That’s why your generous giving is so important.

We’re on the verge of a great adventure. We sense the Holy Spirit reshaping us into a missionary outpost in the center of our neighborhood.

It’s true we are a small congregation with limited resources but by thinking creatively and acting courageously we can redefine our purpose and become a powerhouse of compassion and service to others.

Isn't that what Christ calls us to be? We are part of the universal Body of Christ. Christ is the head and we are his hands and feet, ears and mouths gathered together in this place to continue the work he began two thousand years ago in our corner of the Kingdom.

We are here today to worship God as we consecrate ourselves to Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Babcock Church has been here for seventy years. The old guard has passed on into eternity. We are left behind to be the new guard, charged with picking up and carrying the torch. Let's hope and pray we'll be as faithful in the future as they were in the past.

Thank you for your faithful giving of your time energy and treasure. God bless you all with love, growing faith and courage as we walk into the future knowing Christ is already there waiting to walk with us.

Let us pray.

Generous and giving God, thank you for your multiple blessings. May Christ continue to grow in our hearts by faith so being rooted and grounded in love, we may enter into your deepest mysteries, in this life and the next, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.