

**Sermon- 26th Pentecost**  
**II Corinthians 9:6-12 & Mark 14:3-10**  
**November 18, 2018**

**“Registries of Joy”**

When you give a gift what sorts of things influence your decision? For me it's a combination of the person, what I think they'd like and I can afford, and the occasion. There are intangibles too, like how I respond to Amazon's "folks who bought this also liked" tabs or in the event I shop at one of those things called a store, what accessories I notice on my way to the checkout counter that would add a little "pizzaz". But there's one more thing isn't there – especially this time of year – what's on the person's list. Gifts have become like groceries – we go to the store or log on to the laptop to check things off a list as much as imagine what will bring a smile to a face.

And lists – which can sorta sound like demands as much as suggestions - have morphed into "registries." And since they work for weddings why not create them for birthdays, graduations, and of course, Christmas. There - I said it! Early in my ministry I swore I wouldn't use that word from the pulpit till at least the second Sunday of Advent – and it's not even Thanksgiving! "Christmas" – the "celebration of Christ", combines our Lord's name and a term for the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic tradition - "mass." Christmas, the one Christian festival so associated with giving means literally "Christ worship."

Giving is "Christ worship." II Corinthians 9:12 says "The service you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God." In the English Standard Version of the Bible the phrase "the service you perform" is translated a little differently - as "the ministry of this service" – and I think wisely. The Greek word "diakonia" is used with "litourgia" to form that phrase. "Diakonia" means "ministry" – and "litourgia" is the word we know as "liturgy" or "worship service." Verse 12 then concludes with a Greek word for "expressions of thanks" ("thanksgiving") – that word being "euchariston" – Eucharist. Giving, Paul suggests, actually "is" a worship service! This weekly event we call our offerings is really "a worship service within the worship service." It's that important.

Now a word about lists - no, there is no Greek word for "registry" – sorry! And while I may have sounded like I was "poh-pooing" lists, Paul had made a list and given it to the Corinthian Christians about a year before he wrote this second letter to them. In our lesson he's writing to remind them of his request and their intention to give and that he was now sending someone to pick up the gift. The collection was for Christians in Jerusalem living under persecution. Paul asked the prosperous and free Christians in Corinth to help them. II Corinthians 9:5 says "I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given."

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No, there is nothing wrong with asking - nothing wrong with lists. I suppose if they're good enough for Paul they're good enough for me. In the Old Testament, as we're reminded in our lesson from Numbers 18, giving was intended to insure worship continued in Israel by providing for the Levites – the priests. In the New Testament, giving becomes worship – that may be a distinction without all that much of a difference, but a difference there is.

In the Old Testament Levite priests were provided for because they interceded on behalf of the people before God – they offered offerings – sacrifices - they “made atonement.” The New Testament teaches us that now, Jesus does that for us. He is the one who makes intercession for us before God – who pleads God’s mercy upon our sins – who announces to us that this mercy has and will always be ours. And Jesus doesn’t need our offerings. But his church does – the church being Christ’s presence in this world. That is why we ask you, like Paul asked Christians in Corinth, to commit to support the work we do on Christ’s behalf, together. Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy once said “joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service, and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness.”

I hope, like Paul hoped of the Christians in Corinth, that you have “made up your mind – not grudgingly but cheerfully” to give towards what we do through this congregation. We need and deeply appreciate your commitments today. We don’t however expect that Calvary is the recipient of all your giving – God’s work is done outside the congregation and the church is not uncomfortable at all acknowledging things God wills that we can’t do. I hope you’ll also commit to organizations that care for the earth, do medical research, enhance educational opportunities, support veterans, help refugees get settled, and yes, wrap and ship Christmas packages for kids.

The main thing is you give – from what you have and from faith. Like you may do when you give gifts to others, consider the one you are ultimately making your commitment to today – Jesus. You know who he is, of course what he deserves – but on the occasion of this Commitment Sunday, I pray you only that from your heart you make up your mind what to give and do it gladly – as unto Him. Then it is a very good gift – as close as we sinners can come to the perfect gift. We thank you for it. The smile of our Lord upon it is real. AMEN