

Giving Or Bringing
Luke 21:1-4
Leviticus 1:1-2
Archibald Wallace

The two Biblical passages today from Leviticus and Luke are like that list of instructions you get whenever you buy a product. The instructions tell you specifically about the product and how to use it. But here's a truth, rarely does anyone read this instructions until after the product fails or doesn't work right or you can't get it together. I do that all the time. Once I tried to assemble a swing set for my children. Santa had brought it and left it in a box. The set had swings, and a see-saw, and climbing bars and chinning bars, and anchors and pegs, and lots of nuts and bolts. The instructions said to lay out all the pieces, to count each one against a spec sheet, and to then follow a step by step by step process of assembly. Being a typical American male, I said to myself, "what a waste of time; how hard can this be?" so, when I finished the assembly, we had a swing set, and it worked, as long as you didn't swing too high, and I had 27 pieces left over. Not too long after the swing set toppled. So, I took it apart and reassembled it, according to the instructions.

Today's Scriptures are a Biblical set of instructions about offerings and giving. And way down deep, the Scriptures speak beyond just a how to or when to or a how much to; they speak to why we should give and what should be going on inside us when we give. The first Scripture comes from Leviticus, which is a whole manual of instructions we don't read too much. Today, I am only going to read from Leviticus 1:1-2, a how to approach repeated often in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. Let's hear what God told Moses to share with us from Leviticus 1:1-2

Leviticus 1

- 1 The Lord called to Moses from the Tabernacle and said to him,
- 2 Give the following instructions to the people of Israel.
When you **bring** an animal as an offering to the Lord, you may take it from your herd of cattle or your flock of sheep and goats.

If we read further, we would hear the specifics on how we should present the animal being offered and who must do what at each step of then offering. Chapter Two speaks of bringing grain offerings. Chapter Three speaks of bringing peace offerings. And, so on! In the full set of instructions, the Israelites were supposed to **bring** offerings for

Atonement, when their relationship and fellowship with God was broken,
Honoring God for a wonderful harvest,
Peace—not the absence of war, but their oneness with God, and,
Their sins of the day, and for those against God or their neighbors.

Notice the word **bring**. Each time there is a set of instructions, the word **bring** is included. Each time there are instructions, there is also one or more deep theological statements. Let's consider the theology first:

The bringing described here is giving beyond the usual tithe, that tenth of the increase of everything that was at the heart of the social system established to meet the needs of the people of

Israel. The tithe assured the support of the church and its workers—the priests, and the scribes, and the rulers of the church. The tithe also gave a means to take care of the needy. It was almost like a tax.

The bringing described here is giving beyond the tithe, realizing and responding to all that God had done for you. This kind of giving had deep theological meanings:

1. It said, **“When You Bring”**—it doesn’t say if you bring, it says when. By saying it this way—using the word, **“when,”** God is saying that they--we—are supposed to make offerings, that are something of value to us and we are to bring it and give it as an offering.
2. Bring also means that with this type of offering, we have to do more than just say a bunch of words—we have to do something- This word bring is a verb—it means we have to act..
3. Bringing also means that our offerings are intended to be made as part of a public declaration of our gift—it speaks of the community of faith we all live in and how important each one and the things brought are to the full community..
4. Bringing was also to be seen an act of worship, because in coming, in bringing ourselves and asking for forgiveness, or giving thanks, or seeking to become one with God—peace—we are doing exactly what God meant in the Ten Commandments. Remember the first three Commandments address our relationship with God; while the last 6 speak to our relationships with each other. The one in the middle –number four—says we can do all of the other nine, if we remember the Sabbath—if we come into God’s presence and worship.
5. The bringing of Leviticus relates to dates and events in that occurred throughout the year. Some were for the Harvest, some for the renewal of spring, some for the growth of our livestock, some for the success of our businesses, some for the blessings of wealth and health. One even spoke to a time once a year when all tried to address their shortcomings with God and their neighbor—the day of atonement. Bottom line theologically—offerings, bringings, worship were and are to be recurring, repeating, refreshing, renewing, events bringing you to worship. Bringing you to be restored, and cleansed, and forgiven.

When God said, **“when you bring,”** God was saying bringing, presenting, giving – or however else you want to categorize it, meant coming to God, obeying God, remembering God, letting God live in your life. So much theology!

Thus, God had spelled out the when and where and how of offerings and gifts in Leviticus—but like the swing-set instructions, we seldom read it, and like me trying to assemble the swing-set, we go at giving and bringing without involving God, not considering the theology or the fact that like my swing set with pieces left over, we might just be doing it wrong.

But, there’s another part to giving, not fully stated in Leviticus. Jesus addresses it in our second text for today: Luke 21:1-4. This is a story about a poor widow and how she approached

giving. Let's listen for Christ's instructions to us about what ought to be happening when we do actually bring and give.

Luke 21:1-4

- 1 When Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box.
- 2 Then, a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins.
3. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them.
- 3 for they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.

The Word Of The Lord!

Here, Jesus is adding to the idea of bringing and giving ingrained in God's people, not changing or doing away with what God had previously instructed in what we call the LAW—Leviticus-- but explaining it and opening it to a fuller understanding. Here, Jesus is still saying

come,

bring,

give,

worship,

but he is opening our understanding, explaining what's at the core of bringing.

- 1 The widow gave sacrificially. God gave sacrificially in giving us his son. Jesus called his disciples to leave everything behind and come. The theology embedded in this story about the widow is about how much of ourselves are we going to give to God? A little? Just some, from our abundance? Or a lot? Are we going to trust God, who says, I will provide or are we going to trust only ourselves?
2. The story has Jesus watching, aware of what the widow was bringing. God too is watching, and God knows what cost the gift is to us.
3. The gift the widow brought was her all. It spoke to her commitment to God, her love of God, how much she valued being a member of God's Kingdom. Her giving spoke to her heart. She loved her Lord and she worshipped her Lord and she gave herself into God's hands by giving her all.

Leviticus teaches us to give and lists the objects of our bringing and giving. Leviticus also teaches us how and when to give. Jesus adds to this, teaching why we should give and what should be going on in our hearts. Giving has to come from the heart and from a life given to God or it's not real giving.

Next week is Stewardship Sunday here at Second. You have already been asked to make a commitment to God about your giving for next year. But before you do anything, know that Jesus is asking you to examine your heart and your commitment. Have you brought yourself to God and given

God your all? I am going to say something to you now about your giving. I will never tell you what to give, that's between you and God. I will never know what you pledge or what you give—your minister should not know this. Again, that is between you and God. But I will tell you that God expects us to give, of ourselves, of our abundance, of our successes,. God expects us to address the failures in our lives, and our broken relationships and our everyday sinful nature, and God expects us to bring ourselves and offer our very lives as an act of worship, and if we do that, that is bring ourselves and give ourselves to God, then we will have done what God expects of His disciples..

Second Church has been here a long time, and before it a predecessor church existed for some time. .Every year since the first service of that first day of this church, this church has addressed the story of the widow or one like it, where we see a follower leaving everything, giving everything as an offering. For over 170 years, maybe 210 years this church, this community of faith has answered the question of who do we worship. It is a question that returns each year. An answer last year is not the answer for all time. Worship is a regular, recurring, joyful time, especially when we realize that the greatest giver is God and the greatest bringer is His only begotten Son. Jesus said, I am the way..., and so he is..

Thanks be to God! Amen!