

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Exodus 35:4-10, 20-21

SERMON TITLE: Why Give to Build?

Today we are beginning the second week of a capital stewardship campaign entitled, *Honoring Our Past, Building Our Future*. Our goal is to raise \$1.2 million to construct a new education building, to remodel the current Education building to provide more office and adult classroom space, to renovate the Family Life Center, and to increase our parking capacity.

To help us work through the issues involved with this campaign, we'll be addressing a series of questions in each of the messages leading up to Commitment Sunday on May 11. The question for today is: *Why give to build?*

Let's turn to the scriptures. Our text this morning is Exodus 35:4-10, 20-21. Moses has just come down from Mt. Sinai carrying the two tablets of the covenant. He assembles the Israelites and reveals to them God's command to make an offering of valuables and materials and skills, for the building and the furnishing of the tabernacle—which, by the way, is a portable sanctuary understood to be the dwelling place of God among the people. Listen for the word of God: **Read the text.**

The question is: *Why Give to Build?* Let's see what we can learn from this text. First, the Israelites understood that both the building and the offering were commanded by God. The issue for us then, is discernment. Are our plans to build consistent with God's will and purpose for us as followers of Jesus Christ? And is this offering we're being asked to give pleasing in God's sight?

Well, it seems to me that prayer is the key to our discernment here—prayer accompanied by active dialogue as we seek God's will together. Now if we discern that the answer to both of these questions is “no,” then we had best stop right where we are. But if the answer to these questions is “yes,” then the issue becomes: “how much will we give?”

And this is a matter for the heart to decide; at least it was for the Israelites. Listen again to the text: *let whoever is of a generous heart bring the Lord's offering....and they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing.*

Now remember, these were people recently liberated from bondage in Egypt. God's presence was with them. God had shown them mercy in their disobedience. God had already given them so much. So their hearts were stirred by this call to give.

And they gave in abundance—above and beyond what prudence and sound financial planning might have suggested. They gave so much that they had to be restrained from giving more. Exodus 36:7 reads: *for what they had already brought was more than enough to do the work.* It was a matter of the heart!

Now I don't know about you, but when money is involved, I'm more inclined to lead with my head than with my heart. For example, when I began to consider what kind of gift Laura Jean and I might give for this campaign, my heart kept prodding me to take a risk to help our congregation fulfill the dreams God has for us, but my head got in the way. I kept thinking: *Be careful! Don't give too much. Gasoline prices are going up; James, our youngest son, might be starting college soon; our rent could increase again; we may be headed into a recession—and besides, we're already sacrificing enough just to meet our monthly pledge to the church's operating budget!*

But then, as I spent time in prayer, my heart began to influence my head. In fact, it was in a time of prayer that an idea came to me—a Spirit-prompted idea, I think. I remembered that we are making monthly payments on a car loan. I checked to see when the loan would be paid off and I discovered that the last payment will be made in February, 2009. Now my head says:

When you stop making that payment, you can spend that money on yourself or your family. But my heart says: Give it to the campaign. And that's what we're going to do.

Now paying attention to the heart has led to some other commitments as well. First, I'm going to give up buying Diet Dr. Peppers for the three years of the capital campaign, beginning June 1, 2008, and give the savings for the building. Second, Laura Jean and I are going to give out of our savings. Third, we're going to eliminate a movie package from our TV satellite service and give the money for campaign. Fourth, we're going to find additional funds out of our regular income to make up the remaining balance of our pledged gift—and then, as other funds become available over the next three years, including at least a portion of our tax rebate, we'll increase our gift.

Now the exciting thing is that Monte and Laura Jean Marshall are not the only ones whose hearts are being stirred by this call to give. In fact, one of our members, **Alan Torok** (Ad Council, Disciple Bible study, drummer with the Praise Band)/**Ron Sandford** (former chair of Trustees, Building Committee, construction superintendent on sanctuary) is here this morning to make his own witness.

WITNESS

So why give to build? Well, if building and giving to build are consistent with God's will and purpose for how us, then why should we refuse? And finally, it's a matter of the heart.