

***“Making a Life”***

Rev. Robert H. Wade

Consecration Sunday – November 7, 2010

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

*Did you hear about the couple that won eleven million dollars in the lottery ticket and then gave the money away? You might think I am setting up a joke. After all who would win eleven million dollars and then give it all away. Surely that’s a joke!*

But it’s a true story. (Retired Couple Gives Away \$11 Million Lottery Win msnbc.com; 11/4/10) ***Violet*** and ***Allen Large*** live in rural Nova Scotia and they decided they had no need for the eleven million dollars, so they gave it away. *If you had eleven million dollars and decided to give it away, to what would you give it?* Here’s how Violet and Allen gave their eleven million dollars:

- The local fire department
- Churches
- Cemeteries
- The Red Cross
- The Salvation Army
- Hospitals in Truro and Halifax
- Organizations that fight cancer, Alzheimer’s disease and diabetes

Listen to the wisdom and contentment of this generous couple. They said,

*“What you’ve never had, you never miss.”*

*“We have an old house, but we’re comfortable and we’re happy in it.”*

*“It made us feel good and there’s so much good being done with that money.”*

*“That money that we won was nothing—we have each other.”*

Today is Consecration Sunday here at Fairmont. This is the day we count our blessings and offer our worship to God with a tangible expression of our gratitude through our 2011 pledge. It is appropriate that we designate a day to dedicate our commitment for the coming year and to do so as an act of worship.

It's been said, "***You make a living by what you get but you make a life by what you give.***" Today is our opportunity to make a life by generously giving what we have prayerfully decided to give to the glory of God and for the blessing of Fairmont. Consecration Sunday recognizes that our financial commitment is, ultimately, not about paying the bills but about praising God and making a life. Giving money is our response to God's incredible generosity toward us as God gives us every breath and blessing of life.

It's true, "***You make a living by what you get but you make a life by what you give.***" So today, those who choose, are invited to bring your pledge card forward during the singing of that great hymn, "*Take My Life and let It Be Consecrate Lord to Thee.*"

Opportunities for consecrating ourselves and what we have to the glory of God can be found throughout the Bible. One such opportunity took place at each harvest time when God's people were invited to bring their "first fruits" to the priest and respond to God's goodness with a prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving.

Read **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it,  
<sup>2</sup>you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. <sup>3</sup>You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." <sup>4</sup>When the priest takes the basket from your

hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, <sup>5</sup>you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. <sup>6</sup>When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, <sup>7</sup>we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup>The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; <sup>9</sup>and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup>So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. <sup>11</sup>Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

***"When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance" .....remember who gave the land!***

Consecration is, first, a time to remember the goodness of God. Then, as we remember, we naturally want to respond with action.....

***"you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name."***

--don't bring the left-overs

--don't hold back

--don't wait to see how much you're going to have

--bring the ***"the first fruit"*** ....bring the best

From the very first crop God instructed the people to bring a portion of the "first fruits" as a thank offering. Their first fruits gift was a *response* to God's goodness and then they spoke of God's goodness by affirming their story of salvation and blessing.

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Consecration is remembering God's work in our lives and then responding "so now I bring the first of the fruits" of my life. So now I offer my gift for what God has done for me, my family, my church and the world.

Consecration recognizes the difference between an *offering* and a *collection*. A collection is passing the plate so we can pay the bills and cover the expenses. An offering makes a life, for it is an act of worship and gratitude for who God is and what God has done. An offering comes from a blessed heart!

I am a blessed man and Fairmont is a wonderful part of God's blessing to me. Just as the Israelites came forward and recalled how they had been blessed by God's active hand of redemption, today on this Consecration Sunday, I want to thank God for some of the ways God has used you ....Fairmont Presbyterian Church to bring life to me....to make my life!

I remember being on study leave at the Massanetta Springs Conference Center in Virginia in 1998 where I read an article about Tom Hanks and the movie, "*Saving Private Ryan*." As I read that article the thought came to me....I believe from God....to bring ***Fairmont's veterans together*** to share their stories and to thank them for their service to our country. *Dick Hook, Bill Hibbs, Frank Stobino* and others prepared a delicious spaghetti supper after which we sat in a circle and each veteran shared what branch of the service they had served and a story from their service.

That was night I learned that *Frank Gaffney* had fought in the Battle of the Bulge. *Merle Corner* shared that he sat at a desk and was stateside through his military service. As each of the men....and there were more than 30 present....I felt like I was on holy ground. It was a humbling and awe inspiring first gathering of our veterans. God blessed me through Fairmont's veterans!

I remember the *Spiritual Renewal Holy Week servoces* with *Dr. Paul Eckel*, a Presbyterian preacher I first met at the Massanetta Bible Conference. God blessed me through Paul's teaching, preaching and the gatherings he led with youth, officers, Women of Fairmont and small groups.

I remember *teaching* mid-week classes on the book of Acts, the Seven Churches of Revelation, Richard Foster's book, Prayer: Intimacy with God, Listening for Heaven's Sake and others. God blessed me through teaching.

I remember meeting with the *Sermon Feedback Group* every Tuesday for several years. God blessed me through those individuals as they critiqued my sermon from the previous week and gave suggestions on the passage of scripture for the following week.

I remember organizing our first *Lenten Study Groups* in 2003 when we studied *Rev. Dick Meyer's* book One Anothering. I led three groups that year and one of those groups has continued to meet on a monthly basis to this day. Connie and I continue to meet with that group and I count those 17 people to be one of God's richest blessings to me here at Fairmont. One of the blessings is that I can simply be a member and don't have to be the leader.

I have been blessed as I *visited our people* in hospitals, homes, retirement homes, restaurants and in my office. Just this past Friday I was blessed by visiting *Shirley Till* just before surgery at Good Samaritan Hospital and then *Bill and Clara Clark* at Bethany. It was a joy to hear of Bill and Clara's 63 years of marriage and to see the ongoing love and commitment they have toward one another. I also heard about the fire at Westminster Presbyterian just before their wedding. Quite a story!

To come along side people like *Bill Howard* as he took the last steps of his journey on this side of the grave and to ***support Louise Howard and her family as they grieve*** is a holy blessing. There is something awesome and mysterious and joyful and sad to be standing with those close to the edge of death and new life. I have officiated at over 200 funerals since coming to Fairmont and I have sensed the holy presence of God's Spirit in every one.

Each ***Session meeting*** begins with scripture, prayer, singing and sharing. I remember being touched as our Elders offer heart felt prayers for one another and for our congregation. God has blessed me through our Session.

I remember God's blessing in Pearlington, Mississippi on a ***Katrina Mission Trip*** with Dave Keenan, Gary Yagley, Dr. Tom Zipf, Mike Harvey and Keith Bussey. I also remember God's blessing at the ***Red Bird Mission*** in Kentucky with the youth of our church.

Taking the sacrament of ***Holy Communion*** with an elder to our shut-in members is always a blessed time.

Leading in worship and preaching have brought me closer to God and, last Christmas, ***singing in the Christmas Cantata*** was a special blessing.

As I reflected on thirteen years of ministry with you, my soul was flooded with love and gratitude for the many, many blessings God has granted me through you. Thank you for the wonderful ways you have helped shape and make my life.

These blessings I have mentioned....and there are many more....are like *historical markers* helping me to remember God's help and presence. In the Old Testament there is a word for these *historical markers*....*Ebenezer* which literally means "*stone of help.*" Rocks were piled high to remember God's help in particular junctures of life. I thank you for often being an Ebenezer to me....I am blessed to be you pastor!

So now we come to our opportunity to raise the Ebenezers of our lives by consecrating our 2011 pledge to the glory of God. To God be the glory!

Amen

