May 30/31, 2026
Holy Trinity Sunday/Commitment Sunday
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
1 Corinthians 16:1-2
FirstFruits on the First Day of the Week

In roughly 4 months, I'm expecting to receive a rewarding piece of mail. This piece of mail should be coming from Community Bank N.A. located in the state of New York with an exciting document inside. Inside that piece of mail will be the official title to our 2018 Chrysler Pacifica. The bank still has the title on hand, for now, until the Voss family takes care of our side of the contract: paying off the loan. After we've paid our share, the minivan is officially 100% ours.

We signed such a contract the day we drove the vehicle off a dealership's lot. The fun that comes with driving a relatively new car outweighs the stress of interest rates and other loan terms looming in the distance. But, month after month, stress can start to build. Month after month, a chunk of money seemingly vanishes into mid-air yet again. The only time making a monthly payment may feel refreshing is when the payments near the end. Until then, it could be classified as begrudging giving.

About 3 weeks ago, many of you received a rewarding piece of mail as well! This piece of mail came from St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. It came with an exciting document inside, detailing what took place just a few moments ago. "Exciting" you say? And, I answer, "yes!" But, if it didn't feel exciting right off the bat, I pray the Holy Spirit will use today to help you reframe your mindset. And, if you're a visitor with us today, this sermon is still applicable to you. Because, from God's Word, we recognize that it ought to be an exciting thing to do the Lord's will. And, as we heard earlier, part of the Lord's will is, **"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income."**

In essence, that's exactly what you did with your commitment forms. You sat down and you prayerfully and thoughtfully decided in your heart what you were going to give as an offering over the next year. In so doing, you will be giving your firstfruits on a regular basis on the first day of each week. That's exciting because of how the Lord promises to bless such firstfruits. More on that later.

But, for now, let's keep diving into more excitement... Whereas a monthly car loan payment, mortgage payment, phone payment, internet payment, etc. all happen begrudgingly, a weekly offering given to the Lord happens lovingly and joyfully. How'd you feel coming forward earlier to place your commitment in the basket? I can't see in your heart, but I don't think I saw any stressed-out body language, worried faces, or furrowed eyebrows as many of you came forward. And, it's all because of the motivation by which you walked forward with an intentional number inside your envelope. I'm confident those negative reactions will also be absent when we gather our offerings in a little bit.

Whatever your decided to give to the Lord, it was not the result of the thoughts, "I hope this will be enough to earn a year's worth of forgiveness." or "I hope people will see how good of a giver I am." It was the result of the truth of Scripture which we heard in our gospel. **"Salvation has come to this house."** It's all with a joyful and excited heart that we give. Everything we have is ultimately the Lord's and salvation has come to all of us yet again today. So, we give thanks with our offerings!

Ultimately, that was the goal of this stewardship series. It was meant as a reminder of why we give to motivate us all to give as Paul said, **"in keeping with your income."** Because, how easily the sinful nature in each of us turns giving into a pressure-filled, begrudging moment. Does it ever feel like putting an offering in the plate is like money vanishing into mid-air? A thought like this only comes when we forget what the Lord has done for us. Such thoughts are the result of the sinful nature which thinks it's my money, or it's up to me to earn God's grace by giving enough, or I won't have as much money to spend on earthly matters.

Did you notice the instructions from our first lesson? Giving firstfruits on the first day of each week was not just God saying "Do this because I said so". There's reason and there's resources to obey the command of giving

with a joyful, excited heart! The reasons were abundant. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and brought them safely to a land flowing with milk and honey. God would give them that land, a land they had no business calling their own because of the powerful nations that first occupied it. In between the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan, there was daily miraculous food in manna and quail, there was water from a rock, there was deliverance from venomous snakes, and much more! God's people would give not for the reason to cause God to deliver them but because God had already delivered them!

The resources were also abundant in why they could give their firstfruits. The LORD instructed, **"Take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket."** God did not command his people to give what he had not given them first. They had all they needed and then some to obey this exciting command of God to give firstfruits on the first day of each week.

The same can all be said of Zacchaeus: reasons and resources. His sins of stealing and coveting (among all others) were forgiven by Jesus. Salvation had come to his house. Reason enough! His lavish wealth was given to God in offerings by providing for the poor and giving back to those he cheated. Reasons and resources to give with a thankful, joyful, excited heart!

The same can be said of all us here today: reasons and resources to give joyfully and excitedly our firstfruits on the first day of each week. I can certainly speak for myself when I say the past three Sundays have served as a beautiful mirror to show my sins of ungratefulness and stingy giving at several portions in my life. Such sins can easily be brushed aside as "not that bad," but they, too, are sins for which Jesus needed to go the cross. At the same time, the past three Sundays have served as a beautiful message of forgiveness: not because I earned forgiveness by giving offerings, but because of Jesus giving his life as an offering for me. I pray these past Sundays, and perhaps just today alone, have had the same effect on you. As such, reason enough to participate in the ministry of giving!

The past three weeks have also been a tremendous reminder of the resources we have! Everything we have is the Lord's. And, what he has given us, we want to keep our priorities straight by using our gifts appropriately, giving him our firstfruits. After all, we have an abundance when we really think about it. Need a reminder of what we've heard so far? Go back and read those sermons or listen to the archived livestream services. Those resources are on our website. Review the devotional booklet we handed out at the start of this series or pick one up on the table in the gathering space as you leave today. Our joyful giving is not just attached to this particular sermon series, it's part of our everyday lives to give our firstfruits on the first day of each week. Yes, we have reasons and resources to give joyfully and excitedly. We are excited to give thanks to God!

Certainly, you did not sign a contract or a payment plan with your commitment form. There is no need for pressure; there is only freedom in the gospel to carry out what you joyfully decided in your heart to give. That is the exciting part! Salvation has already been accomplished for you. You can give because God first gave everything for you and to you. You can give with thanksgiving in your heart.

You give in keeping with your income. The person next to you gives in keeping with their income. We all give with that command and mindset. Collectively, then, we give as the early Christian church did. In the book of Acts we're told that the believers took their possessions and **"put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need."** As we give our offerings, we are giving as one family for the common good of our mission to carry out gospel ministry in God's kingdom.

God blesses the firstfruits you give on the first day of each week. You receive blessings because our offerings allow us to have services on a weekly basis. Our offerings allow called workers and staff to do visits and counseling sessions in times of need. Our offerings support our school to best equip our called workers and staff to teach children the beautiful message of Jesus' love. Your offerings benefit the children who attend our school, Sunday School, Pioneer outings, and Teen events. Your offerings support future called workers among our church family by supporting their education expenses. Your offerings support our mission work in this very community of Oconomowoc as we keep on inviting lost souls to hear the sweet gospel message.

Reasons, resources, and rewarding results. It's why we give the way we do! When we keep this in mind, we all joyfully give, even if you didn't fill out a commitment form.

Reasons, resources, and rewarding results. It's why offerings are the first thing we consider with our budget rather than the last thing. We are gospel-motivated to give to God first and then balance the budget with what's left, not the other way around.

Reasons, resources, and rewarding results. It's why all of us say, "I wish I could give more in the plate!" But, it's why we can say at the same time, "I can give more by giving my time and my talents in service to God here at church and also out in my community."

Dear family of God, our LORD has promised in his Word to bless our giving by carrying out his kingdom among us. Remain close to him by utilizing his Word and Sacraments, and he will bless your heart, motivating you to give with an excited heart. As such, what you handed in is not a contract, but a letter of thanks to God for everything he has done for you and everything he has given you. Amen.