



# Massanutten

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## Enough and More Than Enough

A Sermon Preached by John P. Leggett

November 8, 2009

*Commitment Sunday (Year B)*

**Exodus 35:4-36:7**

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*Moses spoke to the entire congregation of Israel, saying, "This is what GOD has commanded: Gather from among you an offering for GOD. Receive on GOD's behalf what everyone is willing to give as an offering: gold, silver, bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet material; fine linen; goats' hair; tanned rams' skins; dolphin skins; acacia wood; lamp oil; spices for anointing oils and for fragrant incense; onyx stones and other stones for setting in the Ephod and the Breastpiece.*

*"Come—all of you who have skills—come and make everything that GOD has commanded: The Dwelling with its tent and cover, its hooks, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases; the Chest with its poles, the Atonement-Cover and veiling curtain; the Table with its poles and implements and the Bread of the Presence; the Lampstand for giving light with its furnishings and lamps and the oil for lighting; the Altar of Incense with its poles, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense; the screen for the door at the entrance to The Dwelling; the Altar of Whole-Burnt-Offering with its bronze grate and poles and all its implements; the Washbasin with its base; the tapestry hangings for the Courtyard with the posts and bases, the screen for the Courtyard gate; the pegs for The Dwelling, the pegs for the Courtyard with their cords; the official vestments for ministering in the Holy Place, the sacred vestments for Aaron the priest and for his sons serving as priests."*

*So everyone in the community of Israel left the presence of Moses. Then they came back, every one whose heart was roused, whose spirit was freely responsive, bringing offerings to GOD for building the Tent of Meeting, furnishing it for worship and making the holy vestments. They came, both men and women, all the willing spirits among them, offering brooches, earrings, rings, necklaces—anything made of gold—offering up their gold jewelry to GOD. And anyone who had blue, purple, and scarlet fabrics; fine linen; goats' hair; tanned leather; and dolphin skins brought them. Everyone who wanted to offer up silver or bronze as a gift to GOD brought it. Everyone who had acacia wood that could be used in the work, brought it. All the women skilled at weaving brought their weavings of blue and purple and scarlet fabrics and their fine linens. And all the women who were gifted in spinning, spun the goats' hair.*

*The leaders brought onyx and other precious stones for setting in the Ephod and the Breastpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for lamp oil, anointing oil, and incense. Every man and woman in Israel whose heart moved them freely to bring something for the work that GOD through Moses had commanded them to make, brought it, a voluntary offering for GOD.*



Not too long ago I ran across a Presbyterian pastor who had received an email from a younger minister asking him what he was going to say about stewardship this year. The question was prompted by a real concern: these tough economic times make it extremely difficult to talk about giving generously and the congregation's budget.

Here's the email response that questioner received: "For what it's worth, I plan to preach what I've always preached about stewardship: that stewardship is not fundamentally about budget-raising, but about consciousness-raising... it's about raising our sights to the (abundance) of grace all around us, even in very hard economic times – even when the ground is moving beneath our feet. Stewardship is about responding to that grace graciously."

He goes on to write, "A proper stewardship is about a life of demonstrated gratitude, regardless of the economic circumstance. I will (admit) that gratitude is easier to hold to when everything is going great, and it is exponentially harder in the wilderness. I am aware of the wilderness lots of folks in the congregation are experiencing....But ultimately, I will come back around to naming and claiming gratitude for the grace we have known and know even now... and I will speak of those far more vulnerable than we" (With thanks to Randy Harris, who quoted these words of Bob Dunham in one of his sermons).

I couldn't agree more with that response. At its heart, our stewardship is the grateful awareness that life and everything in it is sheer gift. And, no matter how great our congregation's needs may be—no matter how large the budget or the debt—we will never give to it generously until we give in grateful response to what God means in our lives.

That's what makes this strange story we read from Exodus this morning so important. This passage describes a time unlike any we've ever experienced. I mean, really, have you ever heard someone from the Stewardship Ministry stand in this pulpit and politely ask you to stop giving because we're all giving too much? No? So what was going on then that caused Moses to say what he did?

To even begin to understand, we need to go back to the beginning of the Exodus story. The Israelites were slaves in the foreign land of Egypt, and they were being treated more harshly with each passing day. When they could stand it no more, they cried out to God to help them, and we're told that God heard the sounds of their suffering and delivered them, bringing them from slavery into freedom, from desperation into hope, from Egypt into the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. And God was with them each step of their journey. God guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a fire by night.

And when the people began to grumble because they were tired and hungry, God provided manna for them to eat and be filled. When the people became parched with thirst, God told Moses to strike a rock and the water poured out and they drank, quenching their thirst. When the people needed order and instruction, God gave them the Ten



No, none of those motivations was behind their staggeringly generous stewardship. At least for that particular moment in the congregation's life, their entire motivation was that they recognized that life itself is a gift from God. When you look at life as pure gift, the only way to live is by responding with deep and abiding gratitude. So the people gave, and gave, and gave. And do you know what happened? Moses actually had to ask them to stop giving. Can you imagine it?

The people chosen by God to lead the skilled workers told Moses they had received way too much. They asked Moses to restrain the people from giving any more. The Israelites were so caught up in responding to God's generosity, that they did not even bother to calculate a pledge, or figure out their tithe, or weigh their needs against the needs of the church.

Somehow, they reached down into their spiritual depths and remembered. They remembered God's generosity towards them. They remembered how God continued to give them second chances. They remembered how God continually saved and preserved their lives. And they found themselves overwhelmed with gratitude, wanting to give back to the one who had given them so much.

Today, as we make our commitments to the *2010 Operating Budget* and to the *New Era of Ministry Campaign*, I want to encourage you to look deep into your past with God—and to our congregation's past as well. Remember the overwhelming ways that God has used our life together as Massanutten Presbyterian Church to change lives.

For the better part of this year, we have been thinking together about that very ministry. We've talked about what we as a congregation sense God is calling us to do, and out of the dreams and visions you shared, the officers of the church have identified the significant ministry that will receive our focus in the coming months:

We're going to focus on worship so that we sing with joy from a wide variety of musical styles and offer ourselves anew to the God who is worthy of our praise. You have asked that we sing some newer songs, and we've heard you. In fact, it would be hard to find a song any newer than the one we're about to sing together.

We're going to give our congregation away in local mission, and I hope that you have marked April 10 on your calendar so that you can be part of the service blitz that our congregation is planning to do throughout Rockingham County.

We're going to provide programs and people to support and love our children and youth into the fullness of life with God.

We're going to focus on caring for one another in the congregation through prayer and the continued work of the lay visitation team and through the Tabitha Fund that we established to respond to the economic crisis.

We're going to focus on extending the hospitality of Christ to new members as we seek to make disciples through our life together.

