Sermon for Oct. 25, 2026
Consecration Sunday
"A Reason to Tithe”

Genesis 14:17-20

What do Methodists believe about tithing? Perhaps it might be a good idea to define what a tithe is. A tithe is defined differently by different people but usually it means 1/10th of a person’s income. It is also a Biblical standard for giving to God. In Leviticus God directed the children of Israel to give 1/10th of the produce of the land to God. To this day the tithe is still a standard or benchmark for Christian giving. So what do Methodists believe about tithing?

I heard a Baptist preacher’s wife once tell a Sunday School class that Methodists don’t believe in tithing, that is why Methodists always talk about stewardship. To set the record straight historically Methodists believe that: “tithing is the minimum goal of giving in the United Methodist Church." (The Book of Discipline, 2024, ¶ 629.5e) One of the qualifications for ministry in the Book of Discipline (2024) is that pastors "teach and model generous Christian giving with a focus on tithing as God’s standard of giving."(¶ 304c) We talk about Stewardship because tithing is just one aspect of a larger issue. Stewardship is the idea that everything we have, even our lives, is a gift from God. We are stewards or caretakers of the money, possessions, talents, gifts and time God has given us. Clearly what we do with our income falls under that heading, but only as one category. Yet too often the topic of tithing gets lost.

I have preached on tithing a lot in my 36 years as a pastor. One of the things I have struggled with is how to give people a good reason to tithe. What could motivate people to give one tenth of their income to God? Let’s consider the origins of tithing.

The first tithe in the Bible is in Genesis 14, and it involved an interesting character: Mel - you know Mel Chizedeck. Old Melchizedek is so interesting because he was a worshipper of God. Remember this is before there was an Israel or Moses or the Ten Commandments. He was a priest of the Most High God before Abraham and Sarah had Isaac, Israel’s father. Melchizedek is only mentioned 2 other places in the Bible. Psalm 110 sees him as a model for the Messiah. It says of God’s chosen King, “You are a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” While quoting that verse, Hebrews 5 says that Jesus is our great High Priest according like Melchizedek, because Jesus came to be a high priest for all humanity, not just for Israel.

The story also involves Father Abraham, called Abram in this passage. Abraham had just won a military victory. Abraham’s nephew Lot had been taken captive and all his goods stolen by a group of kings. When Abraham heard about it, he went and rescued his nephew. With only a little more than 300 men Abraham defeated three kings and rescued Lot and his family.

After this victory King Melchizedek came out to meet Abraham with bread and wine, and Melchizedek blessed Abraham saying, “Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” It says that Abraham gave one tenth of everything to God.

So, the first tithe was an act of gratitude. Abraham was grateful that God had delivered him from his enemies and had given him the victory. He was thankful that God had blessed him through the king/priest Melchizedek. So, in response to God's blessing, he gave a tenth of his possessions to God. That was the first tithe.

So, what happened to the tithing concept after that? It didn't come up again until Genesis 28. Jacob, Abraham and Sarah's grandson, was fleeing for his life from his brother Esau. One night he lay down on the ground and used a stone for a pillow. The fact that he was sleeping out in the open with a stone for a pillow shows the kind of predicament he was in. That night Jacob had a dream.

In the dream he saw angels going up and down a ladder - this is Jacob's ladder that you might have heard of. The dream was a message from God. God was telling Jacob that he was not alone. Even though he had nothing and was fleeing for his life, God was with him, and even as he slept God's angels was caring for Jacob.

When Jacob woke up, he anointed a stone and named the place "God's house" or in Hebrew "Bet' El" - Bethel. Then Jacob pledged to give one tenth back to God of all he would receive from God; to pledge a tithe. Jacob recognized that he had nothing and that God was blessing him. He knew that all he would receive would be a gift from God. It was all God's to begin with. Jacob was just returning part of it to God.

But more important than that was the emotion behind the tithe. For Jacob tithing was an act of worship that spontaneously grew out of thanksgiving. Jacob was thankful for the promise from God, that angels would protect him. Jacob was also thankful for the comfort that this angelic revelation gave him the midst of his loneliness and fear.

Has God blessed you? Have you ever received a word of comfort from God? Have you ever felt an assurance that God was watching over you? Do you have enough food and clothing to care for you and your family? Have you ever received an answer to prayer? Have you ever known a great victory in the battles of your life?

God has blessed you! God has given you new life though Jesus Christ. God has given the Son to die and rise again for you. God has offered you perfect peace that passeth understanding. God has revealed to you that his angels at ascending and descending a heavenly ladder to take care of you.

What will you do? Abraham gave a tenth of all he had to God. Jacob pledged a tenth of all he would receive. Maybe that is a good reason to give! God has done so much for us, so we should give as a response of gratitude and thankfulness.

If you need a reason tithe then here it is. Tithe to give thanks to God for the blessings he has given you! Or perhaps intentionally move in the direction of tithing to thank God. Tithing after all is not a rule for us Christians; it is a benchmark. Mark where you are on the bench of the percentage of your income you give. They set a goal to exceed that and grow. Not out of guilt of an attempt to make yourself righteous, but as an act of worship and thanksgiving to God. God has given us so much. A tenth seems so little to give back, but as a token of gratitude - it's a good start!