



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost September 27, 2015

“Don’t Just Check the Box!”

(Mark 10:17)

Rev. David K. Groth

17And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Mark 10:17

COLLECT: Everlasting Father, source of every blessing, mercifully direct and govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may complete the works You have prepared for us to do; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.. **Amen**

Ignited!

So here's a brief synopsis of how this all came about. In 2014 our church spent quite a bit of time doing some strategic planning. We took surveys. We asked questions. Where have we come from? What are our strengths? What are some of the challenges we face? What are the demographics of the community, and the greatest needs in our community? And most importantly, what is the Lord calling us to do?

We sifted and winnowed the goals and objectives. Then in December, the voters decided we needed to launch a generosity campaign to raise the money required to accomplish these objectives.

And so, after much work by many different people, here we are, the first weekend in a series, an initiative we are calling "Ignited." I cannot tell you how important this is to our church. Ignited is about the future of our church and our school and the work we do in the community. I'm excited about the goals of Ignited and I think you should be too. It includes investing in youth ministry, eliminating our debt, expanding enrollment in our school, taking care of our staff, equipping the sanctuary and the youth room with appropriate technology to assist with worship and Bible Study. What else? It includes the support of foreign missions, family nights at Good Shepherd, community service projects, taking care of our facilities, (for example, our parking lot and roof). Any questions about Ignited? Good! We don't have the time anyway! (I'm confident over the next weeks all your questions will be answered.) In any event, I believe these plans are reflective of our faith in God, our commitment to the kingdom of God, and our deep love for this church, and our commitment to this community.

The plan will cost money, a lot of it, with the two year generosity goal of \$2.1 million dollars, which includes all our usual expenses for the church and school over two years, plus more to support these other goals and objectives. So it's one fund, for all the usual expenses, plus more for these additional goals.

But this is about more than money. It is about the faith and hope of the members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and School in the year of our Lord 2015. It is about our priorities and our possessions and our responsibility. It is about our love for this church and our hope for its future. It's about our concern for the growing number of people in our community who neither know nor love the Lord Jesus Christ. It is ultimately about being disciples of Jesus.

And my plea to you this morning is don't just check the box! Resist the urge to just check the box.

You know what I'm talking about. Every stewardship effort has a commitment card, and this one does too. There will be a box for you to check indicating the level of the commitment you intend to make. Now, I know myself. I know I might be tempted to keep it simple and easy . . . to tally up my current giving, and resolve that I could probably afford, albeit reluctantly, to give a little more, and dutifully check the box on the commitment card indicating my willingness to do so. And there you have it. Done!

And if I were honest with you, I'd just prefer to turn this five week emphasis to two, because money is an uncomfortable topic, and you see I have this insatiable urge to have people like me and this generosity focus is not helping with that endeavor! I'd rather just check the box. But you know, too many of our dealings with Jesus are about checking off the box.

Did I go to church this week? Check.

Did I pray before mealtime? Check.

Did I write out a check? Check.

Am I trying to be kind to others, maybe even serve a little here or there? Check.

Do I believe in Jesus as my Savior, a sort of Get Out of Eternal Jail for Free Card? Check. Check, Check, Check, Check, Check. But life together with Jesus is about so much more than just checking the box.

I think that's the point of our Gospel lesson this morning, when that young rich man ran up to Jesus and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What box must I check off to get into heaven?" Clearly, this young man is not a Lutheran! We sons and daughters of Martin Luther know there's not a thing you can do to earn eternal life. You cannot work or give or sacrifice your way into the kingdom. All you can do is receive your inheritance. This young man doesn't know that and it's gnawing at him. He's got it all: great job, good friends, lots of travel, promising future, growing portfolio, but there is this gnawing disease, this middle of the night mix of dissatisfaction and fear. "There's gotta be something else. What more must I do? Tell me what box I need to check so that I'm right with God."

In effect, Jesus says, "You want to play that game with me? We'll play that game then. Keep the commandments." But this young man has a simplistic view of the commandments. He's already checked them off. "Do not murder" it says. He asks, "Have I murdered anyone?" Nope. Check. I haven't committed adultery. I don't steal. I call on mom and dad at least once a week. Check.

Either the guy is completely delusional, or he has no concept of how the commandments really work, or both. He has no idea how we all, each of us, shatters the commandments day in and day out. He has no idea that even looking at another lustfully is already adultery. He has no idea that being silent while someone else's reputation is maligned is also bearing false witness. So when he says, "All these I have kept since childhood" clearly he is dead wrong, but has no idea.

Now, notice the response of Jesus. Verse 21, "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him." He doesn't condemn the young man. He doesn't criticize him. He loves him. That's

important for us to know because now we know it's love that motivates what Jesus says next: "there's still one more thing you need to do. Sell your possessions – give the money to the poor. Come—follow me."

If you are not scandalized by those words, you haven't yet heard them. Sell it all, give the money to those who need it but haven't earned it, then come, follow me. He heard the words. They fell on him like a ton of bricks. Verse 22, "Disheartened, the man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." His stuff, his money was more important to him than following Jesus. By the way that's called idolatry, and that's what Jesus was trying to topple, not the man, but his idol.

Money is the most common idol in our land as well. Our money, how we use it, what it does for us, is very close to the heart of who we are. Remember what Jesus said? "Where your money is, there your heart is also." That is, show him how you use your money, and he will show you what's really important to you, and conversely what's really not all that important to you. So if God and the Christian faith and this church are important to you, don't just check the box. Over the next weeks, don't just observe from the sidelines. Get in the game, and let's do this together.

I believe for most of us, whether rich or poor, there's plenty of room for improvement with regards to our stewardship of resources. So I challenge you to be generous, not just because I believe in this vision we have for this church . . . not just because this place is so very precious and because it does make a difference in the life of the city and in the lives of so many men and women and children, members and non. We are daring to ask a lot of one another because we want this church to be strong for the future and for future generations. We are daring to ask a lot of one another because it would be criminal to hog tie the next generation of this church with our debt. We're already doing that to them as a nation. (And that's not some kind of political statement. That's just a statement of fact.) It would be catastrophic to do that also to them as the church. In the

end, however, this is much, much more than a generosity initiative. This is about you and me and our faith, our hopes and dreams for God's church, our commitment to walk faithfully with the company of Jesus Christ. For me I know this is a chance to make a difference in the world, a chance I don't want to miss. I want to be a part of this.

I hope I'm wrong, but my guess is in the decades to come it's only going to get more difficult for Christian churches and schools to thrive. We need to position this church now so that as we pass it on to the next generation, it's in good shape, healthy and strong.

Do you have a sense for the collective vision that came out of the planning process? I see it, a school full of kids, there's even a waiting list in some grades; other teachers would love to teach here. The facilities are energy efficient, well maintained, well used, a sort of Christian community resource center. There is little or no debt to speak of, the endowment is strong because many remembered it with a portion of their bequests. There are multiple youth groups, vibrant and active, a popular family night, and the church has a great reputation for the Word of God being preached and taught, a great reputation for really caring about the community, and a team of people is sent out each year on a short term mission trip.

We can bring these goals about . . . but not if you just check the box.

Don't just check off the box, because Jesus didn't just check off the box for you! Consider how he became born for you, the Son of God taking on flesh, because he loves you. Talk about dirty work, consider how he purchased and won you from all sins, from death, from the power of the devil, not just by checking the box, but by the suffering and the shame, the mockery, the shedding of his blood.

God the Father didn't just check off the box either, did he? Consider how he has made you and all creatures, and given you your body and soul, eyes, ears and all your members, your reason and all your senses, the strength to

flourish in your work . . . also clothing and food, house and home and family and friends, everything you need to do the work you do, how he defends you against danger and protects you from evil in ways are known only to him.

God the Spirit didn't just check off the box. Consider how in Holy Baptism, the Spirit gathered you into the company of the elect, ignited faith in you through the Word of God. Consider how he daily and richly forgives your sins, and gives you peace, the kind that surpasses all understanding, the kind that assures you that come what may you are safe in his hands, the kind of security that no money can buy.

So, one last time. Don't just check the box, because God did not just check off the box for you! Amen.

