

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 14:25-33

***“What to Give to God?”***

How ironic it is that Jesus, in today's Holy Gospel is talking about a builder of a tower who has to measure everything out and get it all set. If you would, by an engineer's standards. I thought it was ironic that when Henry sets out on a project with our brothers and they are doing something it has to be done to the T. And that is what Jesus is talking about – whoever is starting out building something – you have got to make sure that you can finish it. Praise the Lord we will be able to finish our flagpole.

Today's Holy Gospel can be very confusing and scary too. Jesus is telling us to forsake our loved ones, and follow Him. If we are not prepared to do that – then we cannot be His disciple. These are His words, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:26) What is it that He is asking of us? There has got to be more to this than meets the eye. Then He goes on to say, *"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:27) How can I carry a cross in this day and age? Jesus is not talking about a cross that you might be wearing around your neck with a chain. Jesus is telling us that He wants something important from us.

So what kind of gift you could possibly give to God? And then, what would God possibly want us to give to Him?

I want to make some suggestions today with some pretty clear ideas. I believe that He wants our lives – He wants us. With that in mind, I want to suggest to you that contrary to popular belief - God does not have everything. And so with that in mind - ask yourself, what are some things I can give to God that He doesn't have?

- We can give Him today is our worship. In Revelation 14:7 *"He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'"*

I think we need to ask ourselves, how much of our lives has been about worship? Remember, it's more than just coming here once a week on a Sunday morning. Why is God concerned that you worship Him and Him alone? He knows that He is the ultimate; nothing can satisfy like He can. God is worshipped the most when we are greatly satisfied in Him, when we rest in Him. If you read throughout the entire Bible, especially in the Old Testament, you will see how God demands exclusive worship from His people – it is right in His Commandments. The main reason is because there are no other gods and He should be the sole object of our affection. It is very important that we don't forget that God can exist without our worship. He doesn't need it – but we should give it to Him. He always was and will be, and His life does not depend on whether or not we get out of bed on a Sunday Morning and come and worship Him, or whether we take some time in our quiet time and say, 'God I love you.' It should be our privilege and the joy, and our hearts desire to worship Him above all.

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- We can give to the needs of others! I witnessed that this week at the City Center as there were cots- hundreds of cots lined up and people were sleeping on them. People were resting knowing that there were others who cared about them. Seeing in action “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and then Love your neighbor as yourself.” The Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Coffee County Ministerial Association, the Sheriff’s Department and the Police Department were there in force – to protect and take care of those souls who had no place to go. I can’t even fathom in my head what it must be like to have to leave your home and everything behind because there is a storm coming. That is scary! Some of you have witnessed that. In Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 11 says, *“If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”*

When we are giving to others we are actually giving to the Lord. I am sure many of you remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46; many of us call the ‘Parable of the Sheep and Goats.’ In it Jesus gives a pretty clear picture of a person’s final accounting. Those who He calls the ‘sheep’ are allowed in the Kingdom since they fed the Lord, gave Him water, clothed Him, visited Him in prison, and visited the Lord while He was sick. The King told these ‘sheep’, *“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”* (Matthew 25:40) The ‘goats’ are the exact opposite – and get the opposite ‘reward.’ When we give to people in need we are giving to the Lord. Jesus Christ made it His mission to reach out to the poor and our attitude should truly be the same.

- We can give Him our bodies. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:1 *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”* He is not asking you to get on an altar like Abraham did with Isaac. He is asking you to say – God I love you – I am yours! Be careful when you do that because He will take you up on it. That is the heart that you mean to give to Him. When you think of what God has done for you, is this too much to ask? I can tell you quite frankly, it was June 22nd, 1999. We were in Israel, it was 2 days after my birthday, and my right leg was basically useless. I was limping around, not able to go to the top of Megiddo, and other things because I just couldn’t do it. Fr. Neil (now our Bishop) wouldn’t let me and I had to sit on the bus while my family and others went in. In the 21<sup>st</sup>, we gathered at the shore of the Sea of Galilee to pray, one of our brothers there got up and said somebody needs our prayer. He came over and laid hands on my shoulders. With everyone else getting up and doing the same. After a time of prayer, I was weeping and I said that I know that God is going to heal me tomorrow. The next day our stop was at the Jordan River, at Yardenit, one of the baptismal spots. Marilyn and I decided we were going to recall our baptisms. It was quite something to get in that white gown and wade into the Jordan River. Marilyn went under first and then I went under, and I came back up – everybody and everything was bathed in a white light like I had

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never experienced before. I kept saying it is so bright and Marilyn said that it was because I didn't have on my sunglasses. That wasn't it. With that my leg started to burn, went numb, and the pain has been gone ever since. I actually ran up the steps out of the Jordan River. Everyone that was on that trip all knew what had just taken place. I was healed. The reason I said be careful when you tell God 'I am yours – I will do whatever you want' is because after He did that for me – I said those words. Two days after that we were sitting at Ein Geddi where David hid from Saul. I was at the lower waterfall with two other people. It was too steep a mountain to climb because the leg wasn't strong yet. I stayed down with them and prayed with them. The person next to me happens to be an Anglican priest – Lynne Ashmead. During the time of prayer, silent prayer, I heard my name called. And so I said "what?" Lynne responded – "nobody said anything!" And so I closed my eyes again – and there it was again. The Lord showed myself dressed like this – as a priest in a white Alb with a green stole – making the sign of the cross over the bread and wine – and the words were said to me "You must do this in grateful obedience." That is where I received my call. Bishop Neil gets a lot of ammunition with this when he introduces me to bishops and priests – he will say "my Senior Warden was called to the ministry on a trip to Israel – right after he was healed." You just heard my testimony which I was not planning on giving today, but that was 20 years ago in 1999. Since then, just shortly before coming here, Marilyn and I had the privilege of taking 19 people to Israel, leading the trip and going back into the Jordan River – this time to help people to recall their baptisms in the Jordan River. You talk about God's power and love.

Your body is the place where God dwells. This means your total person. Your hopes, your dreams, your service to Him – your healing. His agenda comes before yours. "*Here I am Lord, send me.*" Give Him your body as a commitment to purity but also give Him your body as a commitment for service.

- We can also give Him our best effort. Three guys were out in the blazing heat yesterday, trying to make sure that that flagpole was set perfectly, by engineer's standard. Praise the Lord! We have got to do our best. There is not a Sunday that I can remember that our organists have not sat in front of this beautiful organ and doing their very best. In leading worship The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "*so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*" We need to do our best, even when the pay-off is not what we expected. You know, before every service – we gather in the sacristy and we pray and ask God to help us to serve Him and worship Him with excellence. And that is because He deserves but the best!
- We need to give Him whatever is keeping you from going all out for Him. In today's Holy Gospel Jesus said in Luke 14:33, "*in the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*" Jesus is talking about the cost of discipleship here and He gives some very direct instruction. Jesus wants His hearers to realize that to follow Him means to follow Him wholeheartedly.

If you and I were to go on a hiking trip into the mountains there would be some things we would absolutely have to pack and there would be some things that we could do without. We

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might even have to leave some good things behind in order for us to make our trip a success. Bringing too much is going to weigh us down and keep us from accomplishing our goal.

I think you will agree that there are times when we like to give Him some stuff but not all of it. As long as we are holding on to just one thing that is not pleasing to Him - it is going to affect our relationship with Him. And so I need each of us to ask ourselves this question: Is there anything keeping you from going all out for Him?

These are not things you give Him so you can become a Christian, but you do these things because you are a Christian – a follower of Jesus. These are things He won't force from you. Jesus is a gentleman – He will never force Himself on you, or make you do anything. It has got to be from your free will. There is no doubt that the seas and stars are His; there is no doubt also that the rainbow belongs to Him – although there are some who have tried to hi-jack it as their own. Whether or not God owns you is up to you – it is your choice. The relationship you have with God, with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit is in your hands. He sacrificed Himself, and died so that you can have life with Him.

What do you and I need to give God today? He is waiting with His arms wide open ready to receive whatever you bring to Him.

- Maybe it is your praise and your worship.
- Maybe it is to commit your body to purity.
- Maybe it's to say to Him, "Lord I want to endure even though things have been tough."
- Maybe there has been someone on your mind lately who God wants you to do something for or to pray for.
- Maybe it is that "alone time" that you keep meaning to have with Christ but don't get around to it.

Whatever it may be - God wants to accept your gift and make it special – for His sake.