

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
November 20, 2016

“I’m All In!”

21st Century Lessons from a 1st Century Church

1 Corinthians 15:58-16:4

⁵⁸ *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

¹ *Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.* ² *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* ³ *Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.* ⁴ *If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.*

This little girl is “All In!” I can imagine just a few seconds before this picture was taken she was standing on a dock, hesitating just a little. That water is going to be cold. But then she launches herself over the water. There is no going back. She is all in! But she has a smile on her face. This is going to be fun!

This picture is a parable of the Apostle Paul's message to the first century Christians in Corinth. He is wrapping up a long letter to this large congregation by urging them to be “all in!” “Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord.”

I'm all in! That sounds like something a pastor would say, because church work is the only work that matters. But church work isn't the only thing that matters. But the Lord's work is the only work that matters.

I don't want to dismiss the importance of your work, but that work, in and of itself, only offers temporary benefits. You work at a job. You get the benefit of salary, perhaps health insurance and retirement, even vacation time. But they are only temporary benefits. You work at home. You have a clean home, a well-fed family. Again, they are only temporary benefits. You work at school. You get your grades, the respect of your teachers and the friendship of your classmates. But they are only temporary benefits.



In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul is dealing with the reality of death. All those benefits are going to end at death.

But the Lord's work offers eternal benefits. The Lord's work produces something eternal.

So what is the Lord's work? The Lord's work is first of all what Jesus has done for us, right? Jesus entered into death in our place so that we would never have to die. That sounds a bit much to say that, especially to some of you who have just recently lost loved ones. But that is Jesus' claim. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26-27).

You and I deserve to die forever. We have failed to live up to God's standards. I just read it again this week in Ezekiel 18: "The soul that sins shall die." That's me. I've sinned. I have earned the "benefit" of death. But Jesus stepped in and said, "I'll take your place in death. My work is to come and die for you, not just die physically but die eternally." That's what Jesus, the eternal God, did for us on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He tasted the bitterness of spiritual and eternal death and separation from God in our place.

So for us, the Lord's work is to share what Jesus has done for us. The Lord's work isn't to answer every person's questions. It isn't to convince people. It is simply to be a witness to what Jesus has done for us. He died for me so that I never have to die. Even though my body may die before Jesus comes back, I live with him now and forever.

This is your work. To be a witness. And it is this work of the Lord that gives real meaning to all your other work.

So you may make widgets at work, but your real job is to live in such a way that people ask you (or other Christians) the reason for the hope that you have.

That was brought home to me this week talking with a friend who works at Northwestern Mutual. You may know that they have announced that there will be layoffs affecting hundreds of people. That is frightening. But it is this frightening time that gives my friend a chance to let his faith shine. "Aren't you worried?" people ask. Of course he is concerned. But he has that peace knowing that no matter what happens, the King of the Universe is watching out for him. Jesus will see him through. The real work being done at Northwestern Mutual is the work done by the Christians present there... they are producing something eternal. Their witness will be used by God to bring people closer to Christ. People will live forever.

2. "I'm All In!" because the Lord's work guarantees success.

How do I know that? Because the Lord's work is the only work with guaranteed success. Paul starts our text with the word: "Therefore" and concludes that first sentence saying, "You know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." If you have your Bible open and just glance over this

chapter, you see that Paul has emphasized that Jesus has risen from the dead and we are going to rise from the dead. “Therefore.” Because of the resurrection, your labor in the Lord will succeed.

The Lord’s work will be done. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Today we are celebrating Christ the King Sunday. Just as surely as Jesus carried out God’s work while on earth, he will carry out his work through flawed and failing Christians like us. Our plans may fail, both our work plans and church plans, but the Lord’s plan to save those whom he has chosen will be accomplished.

And the Lord’s Word will accomplish his purpose. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees that this promise of God will be fulfilled:

My word that goes out from my mouth...
will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

Eternal results, guaranteed! Sounds to me like the perfect work! I’m all in!

And Paul was confident the Corinthians were as well. So he gives them some practical advice about giving.

¹ Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

“Every week” – give regularly.

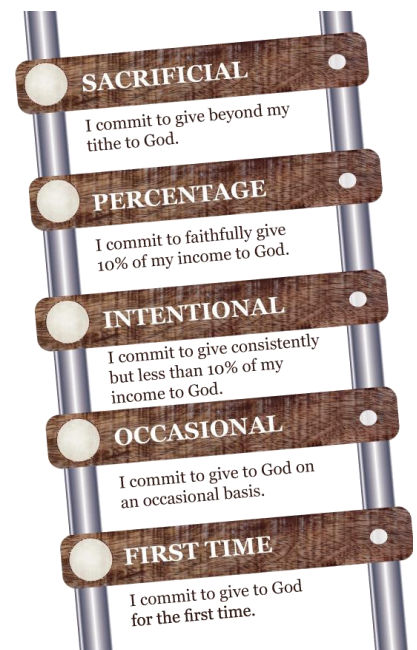
“Each one of you” – this is a call for everyone to consider

“Set aside a sum of money in keeping you income” – proportionate giving.

I like to use the Giving Ladder to help you think through where you are and our next steps.

If you are all in, I challenge you to climb the ladder. If you have never started, the first step can be frightening. I don’t have any extra cash. How can I give?

But if this is the work that makes all the difference, take that first frightening step! Give for the first time. And if you are giving for the first time, could you just note that on your connection card – “this is the first time I’ve given to St. Paul’s.” Your participation



will be a great encouragement to your fellow Christians. You've made the first step! God be praised.

Perhaps you give occasionally. I'd challenge you to step up and become more consistent. Paul counseled, "On the first day of every week." Many of us have found online giving to be helpful to make our giving regular.

The higher you get, the scarier it gets. If you are already consistent, then take the next step and think more about giving "in keeping with your income." In your personal letter, if we have a record of your giving, you have a record of what you gave in the previous 12 months. Compare that with the income God is entrusting to you. What percentage are you at now? What can you grow to? Are you at 3%, can you go to 4%, or 5% or 6% or 7%... or if you are already at 10%, can you give 15%?

When you get up this high, it is great to hear God's promise in Malachi 3:10:

¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Test me... Trust me. Do you trust God to provide your daily bread even in the midst of your generosity?

But why? Why go up so frighteningly high?

Because it is fun! I'll be honest, it is kind of fun watching some of you squirm a little in your seats because I am way too high. But giving at the highest level you can possibly give is incredibly fun because you know that the Lord is going to use you in a powerful way.

Let me share some of that fun.

It is so incredibly fun to see our PreK children singing to God's glory and know... I'm part of that work.

It is so incredibly fun to see the WISCO choir here and know... I'm a part of training a new generation of Christian leaders.

It is so incredibly fun to hear kids excited about coming to Kids Club and inviting their friends to come with them to learn about Jesus... and know that I'm a part of that.

It is so incredibly fun to think that in two weeks we will have a couple of thousand people coming on to our campus for the Living Nativity and be drawn closer to Christ... and to know that I'm a part of that.

It is so incredibly fun to remember the Christians that I met in China and know that I'm a part of their coming to know Jesus as their Savior.

In the packet of information, (and if you don't have one, there are extra copies at the welcome center), you'll see some of the plans that we are making for the future. Wouldn't it be fun to see more kids who are struggling with reading or math get extra help so that they can be successful in school and in life as our future Christian leaders? We want to expand our Extended Learning Coordinator position.

Wouldn't it be fun to see more people's eyes open with wonder as they understand more fully that Jesus has completely forgiven them? We are just beginning to plan to add back the fourth pastor position so that we might better connect with the many guests that God is bringing to our congregation.

But as a congregation, that means we will have to be "all in!" Those two positions alone will require a 4 to 5% increase in offerings. Can we do that? That's why we like to ask you – can you share with us what it will mean for you to be "all in!" next calendar year? Your best guess at offerings, combined with several hundred of your brothers and sisters in Christ, can give us an idea if we can plan for this kind of increase.

Wouldn't it be fun to see our ministry grow so that some kind of facility expansion would be absolutely essential? Now is the time to plan for the future by knocking our current mortgage down as quickly as possible.

Your Ministerial Team and your elected leaders have assured me they are "all in"! How about you? Are you "all in"? Amen.

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My Next Steps

- **Read 1 Corinthians 15** every day this week to let the certainty of the resurrection fill your heart. God is "All In!" for you!
- **Pray for God's help** to be faithfully "All In!" in your life and in for your Christian giving.
- **Plan for fun in 2017.** Make a plan for your generous, joyful giving in 2017 and share that plan on the "Giving Plan 2017" to help St. Paul's be "All In!" as we prepare for future ministry opportunities.