

“An Offering”

Karen and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary this past June. We were married at Bethel Lutheran Church, just north of Seattle, where Karen had grown up. Assisting with the service was the congregation’s founding pastor, Dr. Carl Peterson, a friend of Karen’s family. Well into his retirement, Pastor Peterson stood with my friends and I in the sacristy as we prepared for the service to begin. Knowing that I was heading to seminary that next fall, he put his arm around my shoulder and pointed at our family and friends sitting in the congregation. “Pretty good turn out. Let me give you some professional advice.” He handed me the collection plates. “Never miss an opportunity to take an offering!” He winked and thoroughly enjoyed the joke. I did too. It helped to cut the tension. I think of it often at weddings and, on occasion, during worship.

What do you think of when the offering is collected during worship? Do you experience this moment in the liturgy as an act of worship, a vital part of the whole service? A meaningful and loving act of devotion? Or does the offering seem more like an occasion for taking care of business? If worship were like a car race, is the offering like a pit stop? Like an intermission between the acts of a play? Is the offering a necessary, but slightly annoying distraction from the main event?

In his book, *Giving to God*, Mark Allan Powell shares a story he once heard from a Pentecostal Preacher. As a young boy living in a small town, the preacher was sent by his mother to a florist to pick up some flowers for the dinner table. He had to carry the flowers through the town from the store to his home, and he was embarrassed to do this. He was afraid that his friends might see him and call him a sissy for carrying the flowers. But a few years later, he was in love with a young woman and he returned to that same flower shop, purchased a bouquet for the object of his affection, and carried it through the same streets without shame. “I was no longer concerned with what anyone would think of me,” the preacher concluded. “I was just thinking of her, and how happy she would be to get the flowers, and how happy I was to be the one to bring them to her.”

Perspective is an interesting thing. The very same act can be either a chore or a privilege. The same is probably true of both our worship, and our offering. As members of a church, we have a duty to support it. Yet the offering, as an act of worship takes us beyond duty to delight.

So the next time you are sitting in worship and the collection plate comes around, don’t miss out on an opportunity to give a gift to your beloved. Think about how pleased God is to receive the gift and how happy you are to be the one to give it.

Peace!

Pastor Craig