

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 8:11-12

I have been very impressed, very gratified at the thoroughness with which the Committee and the membership have gone about this campaign. The Committee has carried through on every suggestion I made sometimes even adding to it. The organization has been very, very well done, complete and thorough in every way. Anything that is organized is always appreciated.

I'm sure you might have heard about the medical clinic that was like that. A construction crew was working near a medical clinic. One of the workers got a minor injury to his hand. He said, oh, it's nothing, and the boss said, well, you need to go down to that medical clinic and get it checked out. He said, "Where is it?" He said, "Just go down the street. There's a big sign. Go down there and get it checked out." So the worker went. He saw the sign, "Enter Here." He entered the building, and there was nobody in the room, but there were two doors on the opposite side. One door said, "Injury." One door said, "Illness." He went through the injury door. He got into another room, and there was nobody there. Two doors, "Major" and "Minor." He said, "Mine's minor," so he went through that door. Nobody in that room. Two more doors, "Internal," "External." He said, "Mine's external," and he went through that door. Nobody in that room. Two more doors, "Treatment," "Therapy." He went through treatment, and found himself back out on the street. He went back to his job. The boss said, "Did you find the clinic?" He said, "Yes." He said, "What did they do for you?" He said, "Not a thing, but it's the best organized clinic in the world!"

Well, you've had a well-organized campaign, but the results are going to be different. You might well ask why is he here today? I'm here because last fall I came over and shared my ideas of a capital fund campaign with your Committee, and they decided that they wanted to use it, and a part of it would be for me to come this morning and lead you in this commitment service. To whom am I addressing my remarks today? It would be several categories.

First of all, it would be those who made a commitment previously, and will make a commitment again today, but do not feel that you can increase it. Now, I can look out and see that a number of you are like I am. You are retired, and you're on a fixed income. I don't know about you, but since I've retired, I've found out what a fixed income is. Nothing stays fixed – the car, the washing machine, the dryer, the television, the lawnmower, nothing! Even then, if our priorities are in order, we can continue to give.

Then a second category would be those who made a commitment previously, but now you can increase that commitment, and you will do so this morning. I hope and pray that there are many of you in that category.

Then there are those who made no commitment previously. Now, this might include several different groups of people. It would be the new members who have joined since the previous campaign, and you want to have a part in this. It might be someone who did not support the program originally, but now you see the benefits of the building. You hear

what it is doing. You’ve heard the testimony of those who are using it. You know what’s it’s doing for the children and youth in their programs, and you want to make a commitment this time. I understand from some of the speeches that there are a number in that category.

Then there are the children, and I sincerely hope that parents will assist their children in making a commitment. I think that this is important that years later, they can look at that building and say to their children or their grandchildren, “Yes, I had a part in paying for that building.”

Let me tell you this. In my church, which is Vickie’s home church, in Lancaster, the story is there of when the church burned in 1908. A young boy, even while the building was still burning, went up to a church official, gave him ten cents, and said, “I want to make a contribution to the rebuilding of the church.” That story is in the official history of First United Methodist Church, Lancaster, SC. I was that man’s pastor 60 years later, and he was still active, still pleased that as a boy, he inspired others to give. So help your children make a commitment!

These I think would be some of the people to whom I would like to address my remarks this morning. Now, a program like this needs and demands unity. Each person, the amount will vary, but each person doing what he or she can to the best of your ability. That’s what Paul says in this Scripture. Giving according to your ability, according to your means, each person, unity, all together in this.

Unfinished tasks always have had a sore spot in my thinking. Someone begins something. Jesus even talked about people who start a building and then cannot finish it. He talked about those who start a war and have not the means or the resources to conclude the war. I don’t like an unfinished task.

Once years ago when I was new in a particular church, I’d understood that there was a woman who needed a pastoral visit right away. It was in a rural area. The streets were not marked and so forth, so I asked her husband for directions to his house, and he gave me directions. He said, “You’ll go down this road and there is a new brick home, but it has wooden steps. I haven’t finished it yet and put the brick steps to it, but I plan to do that right away.” I followed his directions and found the house, a brick home with wooden steps. Twenty years later, I was in that community again, went down that road and by that house, and the same wooden steps were still there! An unfinished task!

For a number of years, while the family vacationed at North Myrtle Beach, there was a small hotel, not very large, some four or five stories high. It had the walls, but no covering, no roof, and nothing else but the walls. We watched it year-by-year, quite distressed that it wasn’t finished, but then finally after several years, one summer when we went back, there it was completed! They finally got around to completing the task.

The Reverend Charlie Graves

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Now, I know that you'll finish paying for this building. You will finish it sooner or later, but why not sooner? Why not get through with this job so you can tackle something else? Why not complete it as soon as possible?

You remember when the children in their exodus from Egypt made their headquarters at Mount Sinai for a good long while, and finally Moses said, “We’ve walked around this mountain long enough! Let’s move on!” Walking around the same mountain, year after year, gets tiresome.

Having the paying of the building before you for a long, long period of time will get tiresome. Do it, and do it now! Don’t make a commitment today that you can’t afford. If you don’t want to make a commitment today, you can find plenty of excuses why you shouldn’t. Many excuses! Uncertain future. I don’t know what the future holds. How can I make a pledge for three years from now when I don’t know what the future holds? About the economy. About my job. About health. We do it on faith. We do it on faith. I don’t know, and I don’t know anyone else who knows what the future holds. I’m not a psychic. I’m not a fortuneteller.

Perhaps you heard about the two men who were traveling, and they kept seeing signs about a fortuneteller. Have your fortune read. They stopped to do it. The first man had kind of a routine, you’re going to do well, have a great family and all that. The second one, she said, “Your wife’s second husband will be a handsome, charming, virile man. He’ll be a man’s man.” When they were leaving, the friend said, “I know you got upset with her for what she said about your wife’s second husband.” He said, “No, but I’m mad with my wife!” “Why?” “She never told me she’d been married before!”

We are not predictors of the future. We don’t know. We have to trust God. What happens down the road is not the important issue. It’s what happens today that is crucial! What am I willing to do now? How will I respond to God’s call today? How will I respond to the need for the work, which can be accomplished in that building? How can I respond to help children and young people grow in Christian knowledge and Christian fellowship? How can I help? How can I bring this task to conclusion?

A church was having a building campaign. The minister stood one Sunday and said, “I’ve got some good news and some bad news.” What’s the good news? The good news is we have enough money to complete the task. What’s the bad news? The bad news is it’s still in your pockets and bank accounts.

I have good news and good news. The good news is we have enough to finish paying for that building. The good news is I firmly believe you’re going to make the commitment to do that this morning. The question on everyone’s mind is how much should I pledge? Where does it come in my list of priorities?

In the sixteenth chapter in the book of Deuteronomy, verses 16 and 17, there’s an interesting incident. They’re told that three times a year all the males, and remember that the Old Testament is a male-chauvinistic society, and I’m sorry it left the women out of

this. All you males shall make a special offering. This would be in addition to their tithes, which was expected, just the same as yours is. Whatever you give to the building program is in addition to what you already give to carry on the work of the church. The Scripture says, “All shall give as they are able according to the blessings the Lord your God has given you.” All shall give, as they are able according to the blessings you’ve received, a two-fold test. Ability to give and blessings you’ve received.

Jesus said to whom much is given, much is required, and it has to be that way. Some will be small. Some will be large. Each doing what he or she can.

The Book of Exodus records that Moses wanted to build a sanctuary, and so he asked the people to bring their silver and gold, their acacia wood and other precious metals, and they brought so much that finally he had to say enough, enough, don’t bring anymore! I firmly believe that if you this morning do what you are capable of doing, that Shell Dula and Jim Dennis will say enough, enough, don’t bring anymore!

This morning don’t think about what someone else might or might not do. Think only of your ability and the blessings that God has given you. I’m counting on you! Your pastor is counting on you! The leadership is counting on you! And yes, I believe that God is counting on you to fully complete this program, which will enable your children and youth to more fully become a part of His Kingdom. I’m counting on you! Do you best! Have a part in this program!

Once in the rural church I was serving, we were going to build a new parsonage – financing over a three-year period. I went one cold, rainy, December afternoon to see one of our shut-in members. She lived in a house that was almost ready to fall down. She was in the living room, a room heated by a space gas heater. She had her shoes off and her feet propped up on an ottoman. She was a diabetic, and her feet were red and swollen and angry looking. I had a visit with her, had a prayer, and got up to leave. She said, “Oh, by the way, do you have a pledge card for the parsonage building fund?” I had one, but I didn’t want to give it to her, and I said, “How in the world would you pay for a pledge to the building fund?” She said, “I have it all figured out. You know I have some chickens, and I want to give the proceeds of a dozen eggs a week to the parsonage building fund. I want to have a part in the building of the home where my pastor is going to live.” She never lived to complete that pledge, but that wasn’t the important thing. She was willing to do. She wanted to do what she could, which is exactly the commendation that Jesus gave to the widow, who put the two small, copper coins into the treasury of the temple.

Doing what you can as you’re able. Now, you’ll pay. You’ll pay for that building. You’re not going to let the bank foreclose it. The only issue is when, when. The sooner the better! The publicity has been done. The letters have been written. The posters have been in place. The speeches have been made. The prayer chain has been most successful. Now, it’s in your hands. It’s in your hands. It’s a matter simply between you and God. Now is the time, what will you do? What will your response be today?

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.