

TRY ME
Consecration Sunday

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Malachi 3:10: "Bring the full amount of your tithes to the temple so that there will be plenty of food there. 'Put me to the test,' said the Lord, 'and you will see that I will open up the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things.'"

Now these words obviously were written thousands of years ago to the people of Israel. Ever since they were helped out of Egypt, they had been on the move. They were nomadic people going from one strange place to another in the world they knew so little about. Their comfort or safety level was at a minimum. All they had were the herds of cattle, the oxen, the bulls, the heifers, and whenever they could stay a reasonable amount of time, they started to develop crops. Everything they saw on a certain day was everything they had. There was no place else to get anything. So can you imagine how hard it was for them to hear and obey the demand of God to bring the first fruits to Him and to bring a tenth of all that they had. They must have swallowed hard when they heard that. But the reason God did that was to make sure that no earthly thing stood in the way between the people of Israel and Himself. So He said to them, "Try me. Test me, to see whether I will not open the portals and the windows of heaven to pour on you things you cannot even imagine. His command helped Israel to keep its priorities straight. God first, and He can be trusted.

But this is 1994, and we're not marching through a desert with oxen and bulls, heifers and cows and planting when we can, trusting God for the next meal. It's a different world today. But there is a basic problem in 1994. I believe it is this: does God really exist or not. And, more specifically, that if He does exist, does He make a difference? Is He paying attention to what happens to you, or not? Or has He made us and now is indifferent to our lot in life? The reason we find that question so difficult to answer, is that we do everything in our power to make sure that God will not have to make a difference. We're going to manage things so that we do not have to place our trust precariously in the hands of God. So what we do, is guard against every unforeseen occurrence. We try to minimize all the variables and we insure ourselves against everything we can. And when we do that, we make our lives rather sterile and it becomes exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to see the mighty acts of God.

Well, the chief instrument in all of this effort is what we have the most of, and that's money. We spend it - a lot of it - on insurance, on market forecasts, research and development, and some of us even on astrologists and fortune tellers. I wonder if there isn't a better use for our money than this. What we're doing with it, I believe, is to take away all the risks of life and to remove the danger of anything that might pop up. I'd like to suggest a new way to live. For some of us, that would be to let down our guard, to spend our money in a variety of other ways. And if we did that,

it would allow the unforeseen to happen. Now God told those Israel people to tithe; give ten percent of every bushel. Ten bushels? one bushel to God. Ten quail? one quail to God. Heavy, heavy taxation, in a way. But what would happen if we took that seriously, is that we would find out that risk makes God more evident. It would stretch our budget to take a financial risk. We would rely upon God to see us through.

There are some lucky people in the world who, during a building campaign, said, "Let's do it, honey." And so they took the plunge and became tithers for a period of three years, or so. People who take that risk seldom stop what they were brave enough to try. In fact, I could not name one person who ever quit tithing after giving it a try.

If we did that, I am certain that there would be two results that are guaranteed. One is that God will see us through, and second we will discover that God makes a difference. I hesitate to say this next portion, but I will. You, who know me best, know that on two occasions, cancer came into my family, and during those days, a lot of things cost a lot. One of the temptations that came with that was to lower our pledge to the church. It would have helped. But it occurred to me that the time I needed most to have God be a reality in my life and give me a sense of hope, was now. If I were not going to trust Him now, I don't know what would have happened to me and to all of us, in my family. I didn't want to feel guilty after their death for not doing whatever they wanted to do. So I spent extra money to satisfy their every wish.

Lucky people have made some exciting discoveries and that's worth a lot. They used money to create risk instead of avoiding it. And by doing that, there was a space created in their life which permitted a graceful touch of God. God is rebuffed when we take all kinds of steps to keep Him out because we don't trust that He will come in when we need Him. That's all He wants from us is space to come in.

About 30 years ago, my son was in second grade. His mother learned from the school that they were going to offer swimming lessons at Menomonee Falls North High School. They had a great pool. Regular championship lanes-three feet deep, great diving tank-12 feet deep. A wonderful pool. His mother signed him up but my son was really put out. The problem was that he hadn't been consulted and he probably was right. But she signed him up and he made us all pay for that oversight for a number of days. School ended on Thursday and swimming started the following Monday. It was still very cool around the house. On Monday, he went off to Menomonee Falls North, took his lesson, came back and talked to no one. The same thing happened on Tuesday. He just wasn't about to open up and let bygones be bygones. But Wednesday he came home bubbling over. He was going to be an Olympic swimmer! Now he hasn't become one, but he was so excited about it. We tried to find out what made the difference. So we talked to the coach. And what happened was this. For two days they paddled around, hung onto the side of the pool, practiced leg kicks and floated a little bit or ducked their head under water to

get it wet. On the third day, toward the end of the hour, the coach said, "OK, everybody in the diving tank." Now for second graders, that's quite an undertaking; that's 12 feet of water. A few went back and sat down in the bleachers, but Jim, along with some others, jumped in and discovered something. Water is bouyant. Relax and it will keep you up on top. But you know what else I think happened is that Jim, in those two prior days, had developed a trust in the coach. The coach was saying to the class, "Now, if you do this, you're going to stay up. If you do this, it's going to be OK. You breath like this, and this is what happens. And Jim started to sense a trust in that coach and he knew in his heart that the coach would not ask him to do anything that would be bad for him. So, in he went, and discovered the real pleasure of being in water. He took a leap of faith - probably held his nose, but he jumped in.

And so today, I know that God still says to us in a variety of ways, "Try me!" So I ask you, "Go ahead; hold your nose if you want to, but jump in. It's not for the sake of First Congregational Church. It's for your sake. Maybe sometime, you should tell your tax advisor what you're going to give away, instead of her or him telling you what you can afford to give. There is some excitement in finding out that God is nearby and is very interested in you. So, I'd like to ask, "Wouldn't you like to know the deep-water faith that makes a difference as we live in this deep-water world." Too many of us have a three-foot faith, struggling in the diving tank that is 12 feet deep and we wonder why things do not go right.