

Stewardship Dedication Sunday is only one week away, so it is convenient that today's lectionary lessons raise several issues in this vein: They challenge us to examine how we use our money and power. They make us ask ourselves what kind of sacrifices we are willing to make with our lives. The lessons are both beautiful and discomfiting for they call us to search our souls for the answer to another crucial stewardship question, What Shall We Offer to the Lord?

Before we attempt to answer "what shall we offer to the Lord. We might want define sacrifice. Sacrifice in our culture often has a different meaning than that of the Bible. Dr. David Kalas writes, "Most proponents of popular sacrifice in our culture sell sacrifice for self's sake. I'm invited to make sacrifices in order to benefit myself in the end. My employer or my school or my health club promises me that my sacrifices will lead to my success, to my fitness, to my self-improvement, to my promotion. The kind of sacrifice described — for that matter, demanded — in scripture, however, is not about self. Quite the contrary: scriptural sacrifice is selfless. Forgetting yourself may be the quintessential sacrifice required of the person who would be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It may yield a reward in the end, but that is God's grace and providence, not human manipulation." Kalas, "Emphasis," 11/ 8/09, pg. 60

The story of Ruth is one example of selfless sacrifice, especially during some very tough times. It is a story with a happy ending, but it "does not have a happy beginning. A Judean woman named, "Naomi, her husband, and their two sons are forced by famine to leave their home in Bethlehem and seek refuge in Moab. Before the family's sojourn in Moab is over, Naomi's husband dies. No explanation or cause of death is given. From the terse reporting, one senses that the death was sudden and unexpected.

Naomi is a widow now, but not desolate, for she has two grown sons to provide for her. The two sons marry Moabite women, but within a few years the young men die. Again, no explanation is given, but the rapid-fire tragedies and unrelenting troubles make Naomi's story reminiscent of Job's. Now Naomi's situation is desperate. She is in a foreign land, a widow, and without any sons, sons-in-law, or grandsons to provide for her. A widow in that culture was nearly helpless," homeless and penniless. "And so she had to depend upon the mercy of distant male relatives for her sustenance."

Kalas in "Emphasis," 11/ 8/09, pg. 60

"Naomi begins to return to Judah, where the famine is now past. It seems she will return home in a very different condition than she was, when she left — a solitary, tragic figure that lost her whole family in a foreign land. Naomi urges her two daughters-in-law to return to their homes, for they are young enough to have hopes of remarrying and bearing children. The one daughter-in-law, Orpah, says a tearful good-bye, and returns to her home and family. The other daughter-in-law, Ruth, however, refuses to leave Naomi. This is Ruth's first great sacrifice of love. Naomi is no doubt correct — at least in terms of probability — that Ruth's future looks brighter if she stays in her homeland and returns to her family. But Ruth dismisses what is in her own best interest in order to stay with her mother-in-law. Here is where biblical sacrifice and popular sacrifice part company. Again, popular sacrifice is doing precisely that which is in my own best long-term interest. Biblical sacrifice, however, challenges me to swim upstream against the current of my fallenness and dismiss what is in my own best interest for the sake of someone else. That was Ruth's brand of sacrifice." "Emphasis," 11/ 8/09, 60-61

As we heard, Ruth made another selfless act of sacrifice by working in

the fields of Naomi's relative, Boaz, by picking up the grain left over from the harvest so that she and Naomi could eat. Boaz heard of Ruth's unusual selfless sacrifice, gave her special protection and eventually married her. Naomi now had a secure home, too. "God not only blessed sacrificial Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, in this manner, but the providential hand of God is even more beautifully apparent when he gives Ruth and Boaz a son, Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse who was the father of King David." And if we follow Ruth's family line, we ultimately come to Jesus. What is really grand is that in her selfless sacrifices, Ruth did not take time to analyze the question, what shall she offer to the Lord? She simply and freely gave all she had to her mother-in law and to the Lord. Interesting to see how such sacrifices can have unexpected and ultimately world changing results. Kalas in "Emphasis," 11/ 8/09, pg. 60-61

In Mark, we also find similar contrasts in sacrifices. Jesus and his disciples were hanging out by the temple where they could see people placing their offerings in the treasury. The treasury was a trumpet shaped funnel in the outer court of the temple. As Jesus and the crew observed the sacrificial habits of people, Jesus pointed out some of the scribes, one branch of the religious leaders of the day. Their brand of sacrifice was like our culture. It was for self's sake. Scribes often talked other people, especially widows, into sacrificing their wealth to them, under the pretense of it being given for the Lord. This enabled the scribes "to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets!" I wonder what the scribes had to offer to the Lord that they instead held back to keep for themselves?

Then there was the lonely and lowly widow, who out of her poverty put in two copper coins, worth a penny. She not only gave a tithe, as required by God's law, she put in all she had. She gave extravagantly. Scholars wonder if she was one of the widows the scribes conned out of her money. Yet, she still lovingly and willingly offered what she had to the Lord. From what Jesus said, her sacrifice was truly a biblical one. It was not about her, but God. She gave because she knew God loved her and she loved God. This was truly a stunning moment that paralleled what Jesus was about to do in the sacrifice of his whole life for us.

This leads us to the story of Christ's sacrifice in the lesson from Hebrews. The writer contrasts the sacrifice the High Priest made each year on Yom Kippur on behalf of the people of God—with the sacrifice Jesus made for us. The High Priest would enter the holy of holies in the temple where God was believed to dwell. A sacrificial offering of bread, grains, wine, lambs and calves without blemish would be offered to God so that the sins of the people could be wiped away. Atonement for their sins would be made. Atonement is being made right with God again. If we look closely at the word atonement we can see it can be expressed as an "at-one-ment"—being made one with God. Jesus in his sacrificial and atoning death died so that we can have the most personal relationship possible with God. Even our church vision statement, "Bringing People Together in Christ's Love" supports the idea of atonement. It expresses the at-one-ment of people coming together in Jesus Christ, God's unblemished lamb sacrificed for us.

When Jesus sacrificed his whole being on the cross for us, it was if he also entered the holy of holies, not in the temple on earth, but in heaven to the very presence and face of God to plead with God for the forgiveness of

our sins. This costly sacrifice for the removal of our sins was the ultimate sacrifice. It was a once and for all sacrifice. It was an act of pure love and grace. He was the unblemished lamb whose blood was shed for our sake. There is no sacrifice that can top it. There is no sacrifice we can make that can buy or earn us eternal forgiveness of sins or at-one-ment with God. Only the sacrifice by Jesus could do that. Because of this one of a kind supreme sacrifice—Presbyterians do not have an altar in the sanctuary. THE SACRIFICE HAS BEEN MADE!!. The table we have is the communion table that reminds us of the final sacrifice Jesus made for us, to wipe away our sins and connect us to God, forever. When we celebrate communion we are also reminded of the at-one-ment we have with Jesus. He is present with us as we eat the bread and drink the cup with him. Also, the sacrifice Jesus made was completely selfless, a true Biblical sacrifice. His sacrifice defines all sacrifices.

So what about us? “What Shall We Offer to the Lord?” Remember there is nothing we can sacrifice that will earn or buy our salvation. It is gift from God made possible through Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can sacrifice that will earn or buy us a special place in heaven or even on earth with God. All of humanity is considered equal in God’s eyes because of what Jesus did. So “What Shall We Offer to the Lord?”

We shall offer all we have because all we have is from God. All we will ever have is from God. Naomi and Ruth learned this as God rescued them from complete destitution and blessed them with blessings that have touched even you and me. The woman who gave her last penny demonstrated her astonishing faith in the God who gives us all we have. Jesus, especially, lived and died in this truth. He was dependent upon God

every moment of his life on earth. He could not have done the miracles he did or had the influence over people to save them as he did without his relationship to God. He would not have been raised from the dead, and neither will we be without the power and presence of God. We shall offer all we have to the Lord because it all belongs to the God who gave it to us in the first place.

Any sacrifices we make that are truly selfless are to be responses of thanksgiving to God in Jesus Christ for what he has done for us. When we give our lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; when we share our income, our time, our energy, our talents, our prayers: In order to spread the good news; to support this fellowship of Christians; to baptize and confirm our children and youth; to help the poor and homeless; to educate the less informed; to heal the sick; to rescue those caught in disasters and more, it is in thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. When we pass the offering plates on Sunday and the ushers place them on the communion table, think of these actions as acts of thanksgiving. Think of the table as the table of the great thanksgiving, the great thanksgiving which we pray in our communion litany. Any sacrifices we make that are truly selfless are responses of thanksgiving to God in Jesus Christ for what he has done for us.

You already make many such sacrifices of thanksgiving as a congregation, for which I am very thankful. I pray God will continue to lead you to do so in 2010 and for many years beyond.

Let us now pray about all this to the God who gave us all we have. Let us offer our whole lives to him as we sing together hymn No. 391, "Take My Life."

1. Take my life, and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days; Let them flow in ceaseless praise, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2. Take my hands, and let them move At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee, Swift and beautiful for Thee.

3. Take my voice, and let me sing, Always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be Filled with messages from Thee, Filled with messages from Thee.

4. Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold; Take my intellect, and use Every power as Thou shalt choose, Every power as Thou shalt choose.

5. Take my will, and make it Thine; It shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own; It shall be Thy royal throne, It shall be Thy royal throne.

6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee, Ever, only, all for Thee.

Written by Frances R. Havergal

Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Ruth 2: 1-13, 4: 7-17. The Book of Ruth is a story of sacrifice, faith and God's making life good when it looks very bleak. It involves Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth who have lost their husbands and their source of income and material security. We enter the story just as their situation begins to improve.

2 Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. 4 Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you." 5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" 6 The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment." 8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." 10 Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" 11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" 13 Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken

kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.”

4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17 The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. The Word of the Lord.

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
November 8, 2009
Rev. Bob Garrard
Worship Theme:

Please turn in your bibles to the Epistle Lesson in Hebrews 9: 24-28. In this brief and complex passage, we see the sacrifice Jesus made for as being superior to what any high priest could offer. We also learn that his sacrifice was only needed once to save us.

24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. 25 Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; 26 for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. The Word of the Lord.

Please turn to the Gospel lesson in Mark 12:38-44. Jesus warns his disciples not to become corrupted by wealth and power like some of the scribes. He points instead to the sacrifice a widow makes in her giving to the temple.

38 As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40 They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” The Word of the Lord.

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
November 8, 2009
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: What Shall We Offer to the Lord?
Ruth 2: 1-13, 4: 13-17, Hebrews 9: 24-28, Mark 12:38-44

Stewardship Dedication Sunday is only one week away, so it is convenient that today's lectionary lessons raise several issues in this vein: They challenge us to examine how we use our money and power. They make us ask ourselves what kind of sacrifices we are willing to make with our lives. The lessons are both beautiful and discomfiting for they call us to search our souls for the answer to another crucial stewardship question, What Shall We Offer to the Lord?

Before we attempt to answer "what shall we offer to the Lord. We might want define sacrifice. Sacrifice in our culture often has a different meaning than that of the Bible. Dr. David Kalas writes, "Most proponents of popular sacrifice in our culture sell sacrifice for self's sake. I'm invited to make sacrifices in order to benefit myself in the end. My employer or my school or my health club promises me that my sacrifices will lead to my success, to my fitness, to my self-improvement, to my promotion. The kind of sacrifice described — for that matter, demanded — in scripture, however, is not about self. Quite the contrary: scriptural sacrifice is selfless. Forgetting yourself may be the quintessential sacrifice required of the person who would be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It may yield a reward in the end, but that is God's grace and providence, not human manipulation." Kalas, "Emphasis," 11/ 8/09, pg. 60

The story of Ruth is one example of selfless sacrifice, especially during some very tough times. It is a story with a happy ending, but it "does not have a happy beginning. A Judean woman named, "Naomi, her husband, and their two sons are forced by famine to leave their home in Bethlehem and seek refuge in Moab. Before the family's sojourn in Moab is over, Naomi's husband dies. No explanation or cause of death is given. From the terse reporting, one senses that the death was sudden and unexpected. Naomi is a widow now, but not desolate, for she has two grown sons to provide for her. The two sons marry Moabite women, but within a few years the young men die. Again, no explanation is given, but the rapid-fire tragedies and unrelenting troubles make Naomi's story reminiscent of Job's. Now Naomi's situation is desperate. She is in a foreign land, a widow, and without any sons, sons-in-law, or grandsons to provide for her. A widow in that culture was nearly helpless," homeless and penniless. "And so she had to depend upon the mercy of distant male relatives for her sustenance." Kalas in "Emphasis," 11/ 8/09, pg. 60

"Naomi begins to return to Judah, where the famine is now past. It seems she will return home in a very different condition than she was, when she left — a solitary, tragic figure that lost her whole family in a foreign land. Naomi urges her two daughters-in-law to return to their homes, for they are young enough to have hopes of remarrying and bearing children. The one daughter-in-law, Orpah, says a tearful good-bye, and returns to her home and family. The other daughter-in-law, Ruth, however, refuses to leave Naomi. This is Ruth's first great sacrifice of love. Naomi is no doubt

correct — at least in terms of probability — that Ruth’s future looks brighter if she stays in her homeland and returns to her family. But Ruth dismisses what is in her own best interest in order to stay with her mother-in-law. Here is where biblical sacrifice and popular sacrifice part company. Again, popular sacrifice is doing precisely that which is in my own best long-term interest. Biblical sacrifice, however, challenges me to swim upstream against the current of my fallenness and dismiss what is in my own best interest for the sake of someone else. That was Ruth’s brand of sacrifice.” “Emphasis,” 11/ 8/09, 60-61

As we heard, Ruth made another selfless act of sacrifice by working in the fields of Naomi’s relative, Boaz, by picking up the grain left over from the harvest so that she and Naomi could eat. Boaz heard of Ruth’s unusual selfless sacrifice, gave her special protection and eventually married her. Naomi now had a secure home, too. “God not only blessed sacrificial Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, in this manner, but the providential hand of God is even more beautifully apparent when he gives Ruth and Boaz a son, Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse who was the father of King David.” And if we follow Ruth’s family line, we ultimately come to Jesus. What is really grand is that in her selfless sacrifices, Ruth did not take time to analyze the question, what shall she offer to the Lord? She simply and freely gave all she had to her mother-in law and to the Lord. Interesting to see how such sacrifices can have unexpected and ultimately world changing results. Kalas in “Emphasis,” 11/ 8/09, pg. 60-61

In Mark, we also find similar contrasts in sacrifices. Jesus and his disciples were hanging out by the temple where they could see people placing their offerings in the treasury. The treasury was a trumpet shaped funnel in the outer court of the temple. As Jesus and the crew observed the sacrificial habits of people, Jesus pointed out some of the scribes, one branch of the religious leaders of the day. Their brand of sacrifice was like our culture. It was for self’s sake. Scribes often talked other people, especially widows, into sacrificing their wealth to them, under the pretense of it being given for the Lord. This enabled the scribes “to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets!” I wonder what the scribes had to offer to the Lord that they instead held back to keep for themselves?

Then there was the lonely and lowly widow, who out of her poverty put in two copper coins, worth a penny. She not only gave a tithe, as required by God’s law, she put in all she had. She gave extravagantly. Scholars wonder if she was one of the widows the scribes conned out of her money. Yet, she still lovingly and willingly offered what she had to the Lord. From what Jesus said, her sacrifice was truly a biblical one. It was not about her, but God. She gave because she knew God loved her and she loved God. This was truly a stunning moment that paralleled what Jesus was about to do in the sacrifice of his whole life for us.

This leads us to the story of Christ’s sacrifice in the lesson from Hebrews. The writer contrasts the sacrifice the High Priest made each year on Yom Kippur on behalf of the people of God—with the sacrifice Jesus made for us. The High Priest would enter the holy of holies in the temple where God was believed to dwell. A sacrificial offering of bread, grains, wine, lambs and calves without blemish would be offered to God so that the sins of the people could be wiped away. Atonement for their sins would

be made. Atonement is being made right with God again. If we look closely at the word atonement we can see it can be expressed as an “at-one-ment”— being made one with God. Jesus in his sacrificial and atoning death died so that we can have the most personal relationship possible with God. Even our church vision statement, “Bringing People Together in Christ’s Love” supports the idea of atonement. It expresses the at-one-ment of people coming together in Jesus Christ, God’s unblemished lamb sacrificed for us.

When Jesus sacrificed his whole being on the cross for us, it was if he also entered the holy of holies, not in the temple on earth, but in heaven to the very presence and face of God to plead with God for the forgiveness of our sins. This costly sacrifice for the removal of our sins was the ultimate sacrifice. It was a once and for all sacrifice. It was an act of pure love and grace. He was the unblemished lamb whose blood was shed for our sake. There is no sacrifice that can top it. There is no sacrifice we can make that can buy or earn us eternal forgiveness of sins or at-one-ment with God. Only the sacrifice by Jesus could do that. Because of this one of a kind supreme sacrifice— Presbyterians do not have an altar in the sanctuary. **THE SACRIFICE HAS BEEN MADE!!**. The table we have is the communion table that reminds us of the final sacrifice Jesus made for us, to wipe away our sins and connect us to God, forever. When we celebrate communion we are also reminded of the at-one-ment we have with Jesus. He is present with us as we eat the bread and drink the cup with him. Also, the sacrifice Jesus made was completely selfless, a true Biblical sacrifice. His sacrifice defines all sacrifices.

So what about us? “What Shall We Offer to the Lord?” Remember there is nothing we can sacrifice that will earn or buy our salvation. It is gift from God made possible through Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can sacrifice that will earn or buy us a special place in heaven or even on earth with God. All of humanity is considered equal in God’s eyes because of what Jesus did. So “What Shall We Offer to the Lord?”

We shall offer all we have because all we have is from God. All we will ever have is from God. Naomi and Ruth learned this as God rescued them from complete destitution and blessed them with blessings that have touched even you and me. The woman who gave her last penny demonstrated her astonishing faith in the God who gives us all we have. Jesus, especially, lived and died in this truth. He was dependent upon God every moment of his life on earth. He could not have done the miracles he did or had the influence over people to save them as he did without his relationship to God. He would not have been raised from the dead, and neither will we be without the power and presence of God. We shall offer all we have to the Lord because it all belongs to the God who gave it to us in the first place.

Any sacrifices we make that are truly selfless are to be responses of thanksgiving to God in Jesus Christ for what he has done for us. When we give our lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; when we share our income, our time, our energy, our talents, our prayers: Inorder to spread the good news; to support this fellowship of Christians; to baptize and confirm our children and youth; to help the poor and homeless; to educate the less informed; to heal the sick; to rescue those caught in disasters and more, it is in thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

When we pass the offering plates on Sunday and the ushers place them on the communion table, think of these actions as acts of thanksgiving. Think of the table as the table of the great thanksgiving, the great thanksgiving which we pray in our communion litany. Any sacrifices we make that are truly selfless are responses of thanksgiving to God in Jesus Christ for what he has done for us.

You already make many such sacrifices of thanksgiving as a congregation, for which I am very thankful. I pray God will continue to lead you to do so in 2010 and for many years beyond.

Let us now pray about all this to the God who gave us all we have. Let us offer our whole lives to him as we sing together hymn No. 391, "Take My Life."

1. Take my life, and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days; Let them flow in ceaseless praise, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2. Take my hands, and let them move At the impulse of Thy love. Take my feet, and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee, Swift and beautiful for Thee.

3. Take my voice, and let me sing, Always, only, for my King. Take my lips, and let them be Filled with messages from Thee, Filled with messages from Thee.

4. Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold; Take my intellect, and use Every power as Thou shalt choose, Every power as Thou shalt choose.

5. Take my will, and make it Thine; It shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own; It shall be Thy royal throne, It shall be Thy royal throne.

6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee, Ever, only, all for Thee.

Written by Frances R. Havergal