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We are journeying with the *"family of Jacob and the descendants of Israel"*¹, starting with Moses negotiating their release from Pharaoh, getting them out of Egypt, across what would have been an impossible crossing, safe to the other side, where God started preparing them to live as a nation of free people, with God as their King.

The Exodus story is an appropriate metaphor for our journey of life, as it narrates God's plan, from our rescue from slavery to sin, to protecting us from harm and danger on the journey of our lives, to teaching us to trust and obey Him by living the standards that reflect His Holiness, until we are ready to enter His eternal kingdom, which is **our** Promised Land!

Thus far, we have learned three lessons from the journey of the *wandering tribes*: **first**, when God moves us, be it moving house and home, moving jobs, moving from destructive habits to constructive habits, whatever the move God thinks is best for us, He will see us through every danger, every hurdle every hindrance, every impediment; everything that appears impossible to us, is possible for God. When we add our own twist to God's plans, which inevitably derails His plans, we blame God for the resulting problems and difficulties.

Second, God will provide for us and take care of us, even when we complain we don't have enough! They had plenty of livestock, but they complained not having enough meat! The lesson they learned was the lesson Jesus taught us to pray, *Give us this day, enough for our daily needs*.

Third, God has given His law for the harmony of all society. Too often we want the law to protect **us**, to defend **us**, to favour **us**. *I don't care what happens to others, I want the law on my side! I want my rights to be preserved!* That's not the way God works! God will **never** allow one person to benefit, while making another suffer!

¹ Exodus 19:3

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Paul shared these lessons with the Church in Rome, *the moment we get tired by waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside, helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, ... and keeps us ever present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God, is worked into something good; we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to His purpose for them.*² God's law is to create a society living in harmony!

Today we want to dive into the next major section of the book of Exodus which is the building of the place of worship, referred to as **The Tabernacle** and the *Gifts and Giftings for Building God's Place of Worship*.

The original meaning of Tabernacle, is a **Place of Divine Dwelling**. It has no association with a permanent building, rather a temporary place where God would meet the leader of His people, and dispense His justice, which makes us Holy.

Our human bodies are a Tabernacle, a temporary place in which the image of God makes its home, until the time when we make our permanent home with Him in His kingdom.

Our learning today is the subject of building the first Tabernacle, where God would dwell among His people, and it involves, money and lives! First, God tells Moses to collect an offering, then about the gifts He has given people.

There's the story of a minister who preached on the subject of money and giving, and the following day received a letter: *"I was never so disappointed in Church as I was on Sunday. I invited a friend to join me in church and what were you preaching? Money! I can assure you she was not impressed! And*

² Romans 8:26-28

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why money, when there are so many beautiful things to say? You'd better reconsider such messages in the future. Leave money to God, and he will handle everything, believe me. I love this church and quite like your sermons, but that was terrible. Yours, a Christian who loves to go to church to hear God's word."

I am normally not given to preaching on money or collecting money in Church because I believe, when we clearly articulate what the Church needs, God moves the hearts of His people to give, and my experience says, what is given, usually exceeds what is needed.

We are in such a position today: God has blessed us with far more than we could ever imagine. We have a regular stream of visitors during the week, who want to see what they have heard, and everyone I have had the privilege of escorting around, asked the question, ***What are your plans for this Church God has given you?***

The first 9 verses of chapter 25 teach us four principles about giving, which I hope will shape how we respond to God's great gift to us.

- 1. All our giving, is given to God** - God said to Moses, *Tell the Israelites to bring **ME** their sacred offering.* The people were not asked to give to Moses. Their offering was for the glory of God; it was an act of worship. We give and support our local Church because God has commissioned the Church to do His work in the world, locally and globally.
- 2. Our giving comes from our heart.** *You are to receive the offering for me, from each man (person) whose heart prompts him/her to give.* God is more concerned about our attitude in giving, than He is about what, or how much we give. God neither commands nor demands, which is why it is called an offering!

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- 3. We give our very best!** God had a long list of items he wanted for the tabernacle³. But not everyone had gold to give, but those who did could give gold. Not everyone had fine linen or precious gems, but those who did could give them. Some of the items were less expensive such as the acacia wood, so those who could afford it, gave it. The important thing was that everyone was invited to give, and people were to give with joy, the best **they could afford**, to God.
- 4. Finally, our giving, is giving to God's work** *Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.* When the people gave, the offerings were not to be hoarded up for a rainy day, but put to work, God's work.

God has joyfully given us **EVERYTHING** we have, and He expects us to be joyful givers of what we have received from Him. But there is more!

God has gifted each and everyone of us a gift to serve Him. Now, we can read the passage in chapter 31 and tell ourselves, *I am not a master craftsman, nor a jeweller, nor a carpenter*, but wait a minute! Read verse 7 "*the Ark's cover*" which was specially embroidered, and verse 10, *beautifully stitched garments!*

Did you know, embroidery was a spiritual gift, as was tailoring garments for priests?

The key point for us this morning is this: everyone involved in the construction of the tabernacle; everyone involved in fashioning the priestly garments, the temple furnishings, the cups, and bowls, and furniture—they were all **enabled (gifted)** to do their work by God.

Now, you say, *yes, fine, but embroidery is not a real spiritual gift*, not like preaching and teaching. Well, look around you! Do you know how many

³ Exodus 25:3-7

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people commend the work done in the making of these banners (from Ducklington BC)? Many of you would remember the banners that graced our Church on Westminster Way.

These lists of skills are just the beginning. My point is that spiritual gifts are the abilities God gives each of us to do all kinds of ministry in the Kingdom of God. The key word there is **"all"**. Every good and perfect gift comes from God; including every gift of ability to do ministry⁴.

We don't decide what gifts we will have. Paul tells the Church in Corinth, *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*⁵

I'll conclude this morning with a challenge and an encouragement. Here's the challenge. God has blessed each of you with skills, talents and abilities. The question people ask is the challenge we face: **What plans do you have to use this building**, and I will add, **with the talents God has given you!** Will you decide soon, because we don't want to waste God's gifts

And finally, the word of encouragement is this: **You matter**. If you are a follower of Christ, if you have trusted Him for His promise of eternity with Him, then the Holy Spirit has gifted you for ministry. You have a part to play in God's plan of redemption. You are not a spectator, you are not a bystander. So decide before God today that you are going to make a difference.

We want our lives to have significance. When we stand before God, we want to hear Him say, *"Well done, you good and faithful servant! You used the gifts I gave you for my glory!"* **AMEN.**

⁴ James 1:12

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11