

Malachi 3:6-12 (NRSV)

⁶For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

⁷Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?" ⁸Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. ¹¹I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts. ¹²Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.

The Israelites had not been faithful to God. Not only were they failing to give the tenth God required for support of the work of worship, they had followed other gods and robbed the One True God of His honor due only to Him. They had withheld themselves from Him. Through the prophet, God calls them back to faithfulness, to trust and to full commitment of themselves to their only Deliverer who has mercy on them even in their unfaithfulness. To give the tithe fully and faithfully as God requires would help them trust God again, would help them surrender their lives for His use again and restore the covenant relationship with God from which they so frequently turned away. Their faithful response in giving would also increase their supply so that they had more to give and would be a winsome witness to the rest of the world.

The Vows of Membership in the United Methodist Church call us to the same faithfulness God requires. As we live them, the vows help us love God and love our neighbors. One promise we make in those vows is to uphold the church by our gifts.

Discuss the following questions. If you are in a larger group, you may want to divide into groups of three for this discussion. You may then decide to report back to the larger group or to move directly to prayer time.

1. As a church and as individuals how do we rob God?
2. How does our giving in the church express our love for God?
3. How does giving the tithe help us express love for our neighbors?
4. According to this passage of Scripture, what can we expect when we bring the full tithe into God's house?
5. What has been your experience with tithing?

Closing Prayer: Merciful God, forgive us for trusting in anything other than you. Help us to understand the Kingdom principles you teach us about wealth. May the people of this congregation step out in faith with the tithe and give you the glory for the abundance you pour out. In Jesus' name. Amen.