

First Fruits Giving

Most simply stated, "First-Fruits Giving" can be likened to picking the very first ripe, red, juicy, Jersey tomato of the season off your vine and offering it at the altar to the God who brought it forth from seed, with praise and thanksgiving for all the harvests of the past and with a sure confidence and faith that before the season is over, your vine will yield an abundant crop.

Biblical Roots - Old Testament

In Exodus, God commands the entire nation of Israel to honor God by bringing the first crops of their harvest to the house of the Lord. The people were forbidden to use any part of the harvest until the first fruits were offered to the Lord. To neglect these first-fruits offerings (or any others) was considered robbery of God (Malachi 3:8 NRSV). Giving of the first fruits was an act of allegiance to God as the giver of all.

The Feast of First Fruits marked the beginning of the grain harvests in Israel. Barley was the first grain to ripen of those sown in the winter months. Scripture specifies the Feast of First Fruits as Sunday "on the day after the Sabbath." (Leviticus 23:9-11 NRSV). The last grain to ripen was the wheat, and the first fruits from this harvest were offered 50 days later at Pentecost.

Each spring, Israel celebrated Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of First Fruits at the same gathering. On the 14th day of the 1st month, the Passover lambs were killed at 3:00 p.m. and prepared for eating. At 6:00 p.m. the Passover began and lasted until the following sundown. At 6:00 p.m. Saturday (the start of Sunday) the day of First Fruits began. On Sunday morning a sheaf or handful of early barley harvest was reverently cut and the barley removed, filling a bowl. It was then taken to the Temple and waved before the Lord.

The New Testament - The First Fruits of the Dead

During Holy Week, Jesus and the disciples gathered in Jerusalem for Passover. After the Passover meal was eaten, Jesus was arrested at midnight. At 9:00 a.m. Friday, the Roman trial began; Jesus was crucified at noon. He was buried before 6:00 p.m., when the Sabbath began. Jesus lay in the tomb Friday evening and Saturday and arose from the dead on Sunday, the very day of the Feast of the First Fruits. Thus, Paul refers to Christ as the first fruits of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20 NRSV). In this reversal, God has given us God's first fruits, God's only begotten Son, that we may have eternal life.

Only the Gospel of John locates Jesus' death on the "Day of Preparation", which is interesting in that according to his interpretation, at 3:00 p.m., as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was dying a

sacrificial death on the cross. However, it does not conflict with Easter morning being the Feast of the First Fruits.

First Fruit Giving Today:

Scripture provides a powerful testimony to the generosity and abundance of God. Called to follow God through our own discipleship, the practice of first fruits sharing is a formative piece in the life of a steward. In this 21st century, first-fruit giving takes the form of a pledge! A pledge is our commitment to share in the Lord's work with a gift that reflects our gratitude for the assets that we have received. In addition it gives witness to our trust and faith in a God of abundance who will provide our daily bread in all circumstances of our life together.