

Sermon: “A Portion Meant for Others”

(1 Peter 2:1-10)

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MONEY

A college student had a message on his answering machine: “Hi! This is Andy. If it’s the phone company, I already sent the money. If it’s Mom or Dad, please send money. If it’s a friend, you still owe me money. If it’s the Financial Aid Office at the university, you didn’t loan me enough money. But if it’s a woman, hey, leave a message – and don’t worry: I’ve got plenty of money!”

I guess when it comes to cold hard cash, it’s all a matter of priorities.

I don’t know about you, but I’m really jazzed about the fact that here at Watsonville First, we’re smack dab in the middle of our spring Stewardship drive. I like talking about difficult, taboo subjects, especially in public. Don’t you? Our theme this year is “Ready to Share,” and we are, at least most of the time.

Anyway, we sure try our hardest to be generous and giving, especially when it comes to our pocketbook and putting the gospel message into practice. We know for a fact that it does take work – a lot of work – to raise the funds we need to do what God would have us do, but it’s an issue we’re willing to face straight on.

At least I hope so!

Why would anyone in their right mind talk about money and budgets and stuff like that in the first place? Isn’t it all just a hassle? To that we say, “No way, Jose’!” This is the time of year when we want to let folks know about many of the exciting and vital ways we do ministry and mission – or at least what we hope to do, by the grace of God.

We know the truth is that [as John Westerhoff III says,] stewardship is what we do after we say we believe.

Sure, sometimes it’s tough. We may think we don’t have the resources to be generous. Maybe we’re even a little stingy. We like it here, but we figure someone else should take on the responsibility for making it all happen.

Yet no matter what kind of financial resources each of us has at our ready disposal, there are a million ways to give. And you don’t have to be rich to do it.

[Story from Don Joiner in Abingdon Guide to Funding Ministry, Vol. 3, p. 104, ending with “Mister, we aren’t poor. We just don’t have any money.”]

He’s got a point.

I think that we are poor – poor in spirit, that is – if we’re tight-fisted about what we give or don’t give. Of course, it’s not hard to see how we got that way. So many folks buy things to fulfill their need for meaning in life. But it just never seems to do the job, does it? As one preacher put it, we soon discover that if we live for having it all, what we have is never enough. . . .

GOD’S PEOPLE

And that is yet another reason why we need this church, or more precisely, why we need each other. For us, being a good Christian is a group activity. Praise the Lord, we need God’s people in order to become God’s people.

Jesus was the rejected stone when he was tortured and crucified on the cross, yet he becomes the cornerstone in God’s sight. And it applies to us, too.

According to the Gospel of Peter, “as living stones, we are cemented to the cornerstone that is ‘chosen and precious.’ . . . Our faith is the mortar that connects us to Jesus, and our belief in him is what keeps us anchored, strong and secure. Without a good cornerstone in Jesus Christ, we cannot remain standing as a solid spiritual house.”

[www.HomileticsOnline.com, “The Bislett Effect,” April 24, 2005, at page 2]

And that’s why spirituality is one of our core values. We know we need to clean up our act – from the inside out – before we can begin to walk in Christ’s footsteps. Getting rid of malice, guile, insecurity, envy and slander is just the start. We confess that many of us are like babes at the breast when it comes to mature and generous giving, really giving in the faith.

In our United Methodist Church, we have this special way of giving to others called Apportionments. With Apportionments, we set aside some of our church income to help folks besides ourselves. “A portion meant for others” means just what it says. By giving away some of what we have, we demonstrate through our actions exactly what our priorities are.

Because of your generosity, we paid 100% of our Apportionments in 2004, and I think you should give yourselves a round of applause for doing what’s right. Plus, I encourage you to keep up the good work.

Of course, appreciating what we do have is a good way to start, but it’s not always easy.

LOVED ONES

And this applies to our loved ones, too. Let me share a story [from www.HomileticsOnline.com, noted above] that illustrates what I mean. There were two parents who had a little girl. As they put it, she cost money from the moment she was born. As she grew from infancy to girlhood, she cost even more. Her clothes became more expensive and she needed so much. Her parents had to pay the doctor and the dentist and many others to take care of her childhood needs.

The young woman was even more expensive during her school and teen years. She needed uniforms for sports, and pretty dresses for dances. When she went to college, her parents discovered that all of her college expenses weren't listed in the catalog. It cost a lot to attend school. After graduation, the young lady fell in love. She was married in a church ceremony, and that cost money, too.

Then five months after her marriage, she suddenly sickened. Within a week, she was dead. She hasn't cost her parents a penny since the day they walked away from her grave.

As long as the church is alive, it will cost money. And the more alive the church is, the more money it will cost. Only a dead church, like a dead child, is no longer expensive. Think it over. Is the church really costing us too much?

Everything we have belongs to God. Appreciate it while you've got it. And remember to give, in the name of Christ. Amen.