

“Our Love of Money”

1 Timothy 6:6-19

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Each time I hear this passage it takes me back to my ordination 31 years ago when I received this very Scripture from my ordination preacher. I was annoyed and a little insulted. “Is he saying that I have a problem with money?” I really didn’t think it applied to me. However, in the foyer of the church after the ordination service I can still remember Edith Greene saying to my Uncle Harold—who read the passage—“Your reading of that passage was sermon enough in itself.” And she was right—because indeed this passage is for all of us who live in the culture of money—whether we have a lot, a bit or not much at all.

I understand that northern Canadians have at least seven different words in their indigenous language for the one word that we have for snow. This number of words demonstrates the very central role of snow in their lives. If such a number of words is a measure for something’s importance, consider MONEY in our culture. How many different English words we have for money: cash, boodle, dough, bread, filthy lucre, gravy, mint-sauce, loot, mazuma, moolah, bucks, loot, capital, (and that’s just a start). Studies show that we spend more time thinking about money than anything else (more than food, more than sex, more than God). And Jesus spoke more about money than any other single subject, **except** the Kingdom of God.

The Gospels talk more about money and the dangers of greed than any other sin! Jesus says more about money than prayer. Proportionally, if I preached on the use of money and possessions as much as Jesus you would hear a sermon on the topic about every six weeks (and remember Jesus preached largely to poor peasants in ancient Palestine where there was little money). Jesus knows the truth. There is nothing that competes so intensely for our attention toward God than money. Why was it that Judas betrayed Jesus?—for how much money? 30 pieces of silver.

Yet money is often the great taboo topic in the church, more to be avoided than sex even. Here’s what the Presbyterian Church in Canada says about money in Living Faith (our most recent statement of belief): “.....” That’s right -NOTHING. So why is this? Why is money thought of so much, and yet spoken of so little? One day when I asked some people this question they told me: “because it’s our nature to be private about finances;” “because talk of it can lead to dissension;” “because not having

enough evokes guilt and shame;” “because it’s viewed as “mine—I earned it, and if others knew how much I had, I might have to give more.”

How can the Church be so silent about money and do so little to help people make the connection between faith and money? There was no direct teaching about money in the church I grew up in. In fact, it was only in my first year of university that a conversation with a Christian friend prompted me to ask for my own box of church envelopes. However, in the first church I served when I was first ordained they were willing to talk about money. They insisted that upon profession of faith every new member should receive a box of envelopes. The way that we give has changed a great deal—some still use cash and envelopes, but others use PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance), e-transfers, debit cards, annuities and stocks. But the church needs to find a way to talk about money—otherwise money will own us and run us.

Paul’s admonitions about money to Timothy in today’s passage are straight forward and strong: “People who are trying to get rich fall into temptation. They are trapped by many stupid and harmful passions that plunge people into ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some have wandered away from the faith and have impaled themselves with a lot of pain because they made money their goal” (vs. 9-10). Paul doesn’t mince his words.

Let’s be clear that having money is not evil. Money is not the root of evil—the LOVE of money is the root of evil. In the Bible, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all wealthy—as were David and Solomon. In the New Testament Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea are wealthy and are spoken of positively. Having wealth is not the problem. The issue is how do you think about it, how does your heart fit with it, and what are you doing with it?

Money is not bad in and of itself. We need money to live—but the problem is when we believe our culture when it tells us that the good life can be bought and that if we just had a bit more we would finally be happy. Or that we can buy the things of our dreams now and pay for them later. The trouble with the **love** of money is that it is addictive and as Ecclesiastes says, “ whoever loves money never has enough.” Study after study shows that the number one thing that we are stressed about is money. Money promises the good life, but what we find is that it brings the stress-filled life. In itself it doesn’t deliver what it promises.

To stay silent about money in the church is to give it more power than it deserves—more power than God. We give money additional power in our lives when we pretend it doesn’t influence us, or when we pretend all is well, when it’s not. But the moment that secret is made public, it then loses its power. Once we begin to talk about money and

our attitudes toward it— our hang-ups, our desires, our fears and anxieties, our hopes and dreams—once we bring them to the light of day and the light of Christ’s love, then money begins to lose its power over us. Then, instead of us serving money, instead money begins to serve us, in the service of God.

Henri Nouwen suggests that money is such a great taboo because money reveals what’s really in our hearts. Money shouts about what we value. Every time money is used, money illustrates values, confirms choices and releases spiritual energy. Is our security really in God, or is it in the power of money? There is nothing that competes so intensely for our attention toward God than money.

Money itself does not bring happiness—it is how we use it that can either bring stress and heartache—**or** fulfillment and joy! Spending our money on stuff is not the way to happiness. Joy comes when we spend our money on experiences—especially with loved ones; and when we give our money away. Those who use their money for generosity during their lives find much greater happiness and joy.

I sensed that as a congregation we experienced that kind of happiness and joy through giving this past week. It was just a week ago that Rev. Mike Burns—our former interim moderator and the minister at Burns Church, Mosa—reached out to ask if Oakridge Church could help a Malawian refugee family that recently had arrived in London. The Chitukwi Family had been part of the congregation Rev. Mike served in Malawi when he worked there. Quickly you sprang into action: office staff began planning and communicating, you stepped up to coordinate, donate items and money, and volunteer trucks for transport and delivery. And working alongside Burns Church, Mosa, in under a week we have furnished a new home for the Chitukwi Family—who arrived here with only their clothing. And it feels good. It makes my heart happy to serve a community of faith that knows how to be generous—and so quickly! And this is in addition to giving \$1600 last Sunday towards ending world hunger through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Well done OPC! This week we caught sight of what Paul calls the “life that’s really life”— which has something to do with trusting God, with generosity and a willingness to share. As Jesus says: It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Our weekly offering each week is part of the regular practice of returning to God a portion of all that God has given us. It involves teaching ourselves how to create a life built upon the biblical belief that all that we have is a gift from God. Giving regularly of our time, talent and money to God’s work on this earth is as much a spiritual practice as prayer and worship. Giving our money is one of the holy habits we are called to practice. It helps us keep money in its proper place and allows us to live the life God

hopes we will have. Jesus reminds us that giving must be done not as obligation or under guilt, but in conjunction with a deep concern for justice, mercy and faithfulness.

And our great model for doing this is Jesus himself. Canadian spiritual writer, Mary Jo Leddy writes: “The power that Jesus exercised was the power to create a new beginning, a new way of living and imagining the world that was—according to the great economy of grace. He taught us that what we give away, including the gift of ourselves, grows and multiplies in the giving. He invited us to believe in a world transformed by the graciousness of giving. It is not enough to just feel grateful. We have not been fully liberated until we think grateful, imagine grateful, act grateful.” Here is the life that’s really life.