

June 25, 2017

Prayer: May our words and meditations this morning be pleasing to you O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. - Amen.

"Money and Me"

When a Covenant Member of this Church commits to membership he or she agrees to work with a number of disciplines or practices, one of which is: "Support the life and ministries of this community of faith through the giving of at least a tithe of the income which is entrusted to my stewardship." We know that the idea of a "tithe" (or "tenth") has deep Biblical roots in both the Old and New Testaments. A brief search will reveal numerous references to the tithe in Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as well as in later books like Nehemiah and Malachi. In Genesis (28:22), Jacob commits a tenth of all that he receives if God goes with him on his journey to find a wife and allows him to return safely to his father Isaac's house. The 7th chapter of the book of Hebrews discusses at length how Jacob's grandfather Abraham tithed to the high priest Melchizedek. And in Luke 18:12, Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Pharisee boasts how he is not like other men, but fasts twice a week and gives "a tenth of all" he gets.

We also know that how we relate to money and our material world is discussed with great frequency in Scripture. In fact, we are told that it is the second most frequently occurring theme in the Bible, second only to the Kingdom of God. And yet we rarely discuss it on Sunday morning.

When I decided to talk about it today, I checked a number of sermons I had shared in years past on the subject of money, but also came across one that Bev Cosby preached on April 28, 1985. The scriptures he used are familiar ones. Let me share two of them with you. [Read Matthew 6:24-34, & II Corinthians 8:9-15, & 9:6-8] Bev entitled his sermon "Money: Stages on the Road to Freedom". If you would like to listen to it I am sure we can make it available from the sermon archives on our website.

Later on I will share with you where I am today as it relates to tithing and my relationship to money and the material world, but first let me share with you some of the things I remember about my relationship to money looking back on my life.

My earliest recollections are ones of "frugality". Growing up in a small town in NH I learned the importance of work and money. My dad had a huge garden and in the summer we sold corn and other vegetables at a roadside stand in front of our house. All proceeds from the sales were set aside in our children's savings accounts for college. That we would go to college was an expectation from an early age. And we never lacked for anything. We attended a small church every Sunday and gave regularly

through weekly offerings and other efforts to raise money.

As a teenager I worked every summer from the 8th grade on to earn money for college, and I saved every penny. I worked part time after school my junior year and also took babysitting jobs whenever the opportunity arose.

At Congregational Church summer youth camps I learned from missionaries from India and the Philippines how much good could be accomplished in those countries with what seemed to me to be very few US dollars, and the freeing, almost exhilarating feeling that can come from giving one's money away. The poverty and critical needs of the people the missionaries worked with moved me to contribute to the appeal offerings much more generously than I had anticipated.

After graduating from high school I received a financial aid package (including a sizeable scholarship grant) which allowed me to spend four years at Dartmouth College. Today, more than ever, appreciative of the generosity of previous generations of Dartmouth graduates and friends, I contribute annually to alumni giving and capital fund drives so that others, regardless of their financial resources, will not be denied the same opportunity I was given.

After college I began to pay back the loans I had received as part of my financial aid package and also began a monthly car payment. Later on I upgraded my old Ford Fairlane to a bright red Corvair convertible with boot and Tonneau cover, while paying off my college loans on schedule, and making monthly payments on my car loan. I was enjoying bachelorhood, but was not saving anything.

After getting married in February of 1965, my lack of "planning ahead" caught up with me: I found myself owing several hundred dollars to the IRS, and no money with which to pay what I owed. Fortunately for me my wife had been more thrifty than I, and on April 15 she bailed me out. It was a wakeup call.

Our first major financial crisis occurred in November 1967, 2 days before our first child, Cindy, was born. Judy had resigned from her job on Friday, and I lost my job with Ford Motor Company on Monday. That was THE time in my life when I felt the most helpless, insecure and depressed. But two weeks later I was employed with the Dodge division of Chrysler Motor Company at a higher salary than what Ford had been paying me.

In 1969, Dodge moved me to Lynchburg to work as a sales rep with a number of dealerships in Southside Virginia. But in February of 1970, I was laid off again; this time it was Chrysler Corporation which was struggling to sell its cars and trucks. Looking back at it now I can see it was all part of God's plan for our family.

Judy was expecting Samantha, our second child, we were very happily settled in Lynchburg and decided to try and find employment here. Within a month I was hired by Fidelity National Bank, but at a salary 25-30% less than I had been making with Dodge. My banking career lasted 16 years. When my bank's headquarters moved to Richmond I indicated that I preferred to stay in Lynchburg, and the bank accommodated me with my third pink slip.

I spent the next 8 years at what was then First Colony Life Insurance Company. At that time First Colony was owned by the Ethyl Corporation in Richmond, and I worked closely with Ethyl's Quality Improvement staff to implement a Quality initiative at First Colony.

1986-87 also marked the beginning of "college" bills. All three of our children graduated from 4 year colleges and during those years we felt a considerable level of anxiety as monies set aside for their education were being consumed at what seemed to be a very rapid rate. We borrowed against the equity in our home and also took out student and parent loans. God provided funds when we needed them.

In 1993 First Colony was cut loose by Ethyl and my immediate superior indicated that management had concluded that Quality Improvement should take about half of my time and that the company would try to find something else for me to do with the other half. I concluded that they had not grasped the value of a focus on Quality and that to me was depressing. I believe God was readying me for another employment opportunity.

My Outward Journey involvement during this time was primarily with New Land Samaritan Inns (NLSI) which was developing The Gateway, a transitional living program for homeless men in the former Salvation Army citadel at 12th and Church Streets. The Gateway opened in October 1992. NLSI was also developing Miriam's House, a similar program for homeless women and children on a former car dealer's lot on Magnolia Street. It opened in January 1994. Both programs were the responsibility of Malcolm Douglas, NLSI's Executive Director. However, Malcolm was also responsible for New Land Industries, another nonprofit which included the Wood Ministry, a free firewood program which was operating on a woodlot on Federal Street. Members of both NLSI and NLI boards agreed with Malcolm that there was more on his plate than one person should be expected to "say grace over". Malcolm's preference was to continue working with New Land Industries and the Wood Ministry.

When I was asked if I would be open to leaving First Colony to work with The Gateway and Miriam's House, I said "yes" and assumed my new responsibilities January 1, 1994. I soon realized that this was the kind of work I was "born" to do. For me it was

challenging but always energizing. Money was always a concern. During my 9 plus years at The Gateway we received three six figure gifts, and in each case a gift came after we had reduced staff to a minimum. In October of 1999 I reached age 62 & ½ and I began to draw my Social Security retirement benefit in order to reduce the amount The Gateway needed to raise for my salary. We were increasing our donor base and the amount we were raising each year, but it was not happening fast enough for our NLSI Board. At the beginning of February 2003 the board decided to replace me with someone who would have a fundraising background.

I was about to begin working with The Haven, a nonprofit chartered in 1999 with the goal of establishing a long term drug and alcohol free residence for men and women in recovery from addiction to alcohol and/or other drugs. Until last month The Haven owned 2 acres of land on Federal Street, which had been the home of The Wood Ministry, New Land Jobs, and New Land Samaritan Inns. Once again, money, or the lack of it, has been a constant theme as The Haven has worked with an expanded vision during the past eight years. Our vision now includes the development of a long term peer support residential recovery program for men and women, many of whom are homeless, who struggle with Substance Use Disorders.

The Haven Mission Group may want to share more about our dream on a Sunday sometime in the near future. So now let me update you a bit about where I am with relation to "Tithing".

A number of years ago Judy and I established a separate checking account for charitable giving. We have found that to be helpful because it gave us one dedicated source of funds for "tithing". At age 65 I began to receive retirement checks from my banking and insurance employment. Our checking account is at Wells Fargo where my monthly bank pension payment is automatically deposited. Those funds have been used primarily as the source of our weekly church offerings.

During the days we were both gainfully employed Judy and I opened Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA's). This allowed us to set aside funds which were not taxed at the time we received them. At the age of 70.5 the account holder must begin withdrawing annually an amount called the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), and those funds are taxable when withdrawn. We became aware last year that funds withdrawn as part of the RMD are not taxable if donated to a charity, for instance the Church of the Covenant. Our IRA's are now the primary source of funds for our tithe.

Today I feel good about how I'm doing with respect to tithing my income. Now I'm working on tithing my assets (IRA's and investments). I have found that to be a much more difficult challenge. A number of years ago Judy and I developed wills and trust accounts as part of our estate planning. The instructions

for my estate are that if I die first, my trust funds will be used to support Judy. After Judy's death 2/3rd of the funds in my trust will be gifted to the Church of the Covenant.

I am so grateful for this community, and the many, many ways it has nurtured me and my family during the 47 years since we moved to Lynchburg. A number of years ago our Covenant members sat around a table in the Lodge one evening and gave away \$55,000 we had just received from the estate of a member of our community, proceeds from the sale of a home on Spottswood Place. That experience, plus my experience of 47 years as part of the Church of the Covenant community, makes me confident that this church will make wise decisions as to how funds entrusted to it should be used, and only after first obtaining God's guidance.

I hope what I have shared this morning gives you a sense of where I am today with respect to my relationship with money. Thank you for listening.

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, creator of our material world, who provides everything for our use and enjoyment, help us to embody Christ's compassion for the poor so that we work with our money and material resources in such a way that we become new and more free persons, convinced in the depths of our beings that we are stewards, not owners, and are working toward a more equitable distribution of the world's resources. Am en.