

Sermon on the Amount

October 16, 2022

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Scriptures:

Luke 16:13 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Mark 12:41-44. 41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

2 Corinthians 9:6-11. 6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

1 Timothy 6:10

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Sermon:

I want to talk about money this morning. Specifically, I want to talk about your money so allow me to simply "cut to the chase." Not only do we really NEED your money, but little ole FCMF needs more of it! But talking about money, depending upon the circumstances, can be difficult - so let's try a slightly different tactic.

Let's start by taking a couple deep breaths, stretch out your arms, and shake them, roll your neck and shoulders - release any tensions you might be feeling. Now sing along with me...

Money, money, money, money (money)

Money, money, money, money (money)

Money, money, money, money (money)

Money, money, money, money (money)

Some people got to have it, yeah, yeah Some people really need it, yeah

Listen to me y'all, do things, do things, do things bad things with it

Well, you wanna do things, do things, do things, good things with it, yeah

Just a few lines from “For the Love of Money” by the O’Jays, and the repetition, should hopefully reduce some anxiety.

For our scriptures this morning, I chose several verses that can hopefully guide us as we talk about sharing our resources to fund the ministry of our fellowship. Or, as the O’Jays say it, “do things, do things, do things, good things with it, yeah!” In the example of the poor widow, Jesus reverses a common assumption that the amount of the gift is what matters most. Instead, Jesus focuses on the giver, specifically her willingness to, as he said, “put in everything—all she had to live on!” That, according to

Jesus, is what matters most! Of course the wealthy can give “bigger checks,” but they can do so because it is only a fraction of what they have to live on.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 9, adds, “*God loves a cheerful giver.*” So, alternatively, I guess, this would mean that God doesn’t want us to be a fearful giver, or a guilty giver nor an exhausted or reluctant giver as well?

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines cheerful as, “*As full of good spirits: MERRY, UNGRUDGING, as in cheerful obedience or conducive to cheer: likely to dispel gloom or worry.*” I also think that “cheerfulness” is contagious. It’s not limited to only one compartment of our lives, but permeates throughout our personality, as well as spreads to others around us, softening even the harshest cynic. You can’t say the word without smiling - try it. Or how about a few other related words like, “cheerio” or as you raise a glass for a toast, “cheers!”

Throughout our holy scriptures we are also warned over and over that the desire to accumulate too much money is a real problem. Because, as the O’Jays also remind us, some people, “*do things, do things, do things bad things with it!*” In fact, the Bible has far more to say about the dangers of wealth accumulation than say, the dangers of sex, drugs, gay marriage, or gender transition combined. (Violence, I’m pretty sure, comes in second!). Our scriptures are also clear that all good things, material possession included, are gifts of a generous God. Our main task is to gratefully receive them and then take good care (or be good stewards) of those gifts, which includes sharing them whenever we can. Just as we received the gifts of God with rejoicing, we then must pass them on to others with the same cheerful joy.

Now I hope you had a chance to look over the proposed budget for 2023 that I sent out Friday. But either way, let me highlight a few things. First, the Elders are proposing to spend nearly \$75K next year, which is an \$8K increase from this year! And though I’m not seeking a raise, I am still nearly half of the budget. The most significant increases are for things like: utilities, insurance, and building maintenance, all accounting for \$3K. Another \$2K increase is for homeless outreach and benevolence. The remaining \$3K is to improve Renee’s compensation.

To pay for all this, the Elders are asking each giving unit to increase your pledge by at least 7% and then raise another \$10K from outside the fellowship through grants and fundraisers. This last item does make me a little bit nervous though since we have less control over it. On the one hand, or should I say in the capable two hands of Martha, we have managed to get at least one grant and some years even two every year over the last decade. And then last year, Denise joined in on the fun and is also writing and winning grants for us. So continued grant funding would seem like a sure thing. But for how long will the same three or four sources keep giving us grants? Our most recent GoFundMe did reach its goal, but online fundraising is tough. Reducing that \$10K gap through internal means would certainly go a long way to reducing my anxiety a bit and likely help us all be a bit more merry, ungrudging . . . and thus more cheerful.

This fall marks my 16th or 17th stewardship/pledge/budget season. Most have been unremarkable, but a few have included some late surprises and some real drama. I was looking over the sermon I gave during the 2009 pledge season. That year we proposed a budget of over \$100K, far more than this year (especially when adjusting for inflation)!

Back then I was a three-quarter time pastor but still only about a third of the budget. We also had a mortgage which is no longer the case. At that time, we had children, youth, and adult Sunday school supplies to buy, a generous benevolent fund, extra funds for retreats, as well as an annual amount (maybe \$5-\$10K) dedicated as a line item to be put into savings. (A savings account, I might add, that several years later came in handy when we needed to replace our ailing HVAC!)

Back in those days I was also reimbursed for my ministerial expenses, Sunday morning attendance was also higher, and so we had more pledging units than we do now. That budget would have also been prior to our

involvement with FFH. Our involvement with the homeless amounted to a small slush fund that I used to help out folks who showed up at the door in an emergency: gas, lodging, a bus ticket out of town, or groceries. My how things have changed!

We also had some very lean years where we had to make big cuts. One year my hours were cut to only half-time and then a couple years later my salary was cut to almost nothing. But not only have we survived, but we have thrived, both financially and in the level of our outreach to the poorest in our community. Considering what we are currently accomplishing, we are most certainly embodying the adage of “Doing More With Less!”

Over the past few years, the number of folks experiencing homeless has exploded all across the nation. This has also been our experience here in Ft Collins as well. This other pandemic is outstripping the meager resources provided by social service organizations, religious institutions, and all levels of government combined. As a nation, experts say, we are currently about 800,000 housing units shy of what we need after decades of failure to build enough.

Add to this the recent spread of more deadly drugs like fentanyl and the importation of cheaper meth, our current crisis is only likely to get worse before it gets any better. Of course, we here at FCMF cannot solve this crisis alone, but we do find ourselves in a very unique space, both literally and figuratively. Literally, by just being here, open and available with a warm place to spend a couple of hours or a night, a safe place to hang out on our patio, or to get a hot shower, clean clothes and food – we can save a life!

But all of these seemingly “little” things can also lead to even more, a relationship with those who really care, folks who will listen and then help explore other possible resources and solutions.

We’ve made a lot out of JD’s recent graduation from rehab, as we should and JD definitely needs to be congratulated - he earned it! But he is not the first person associated with our outreach efforts to do so. Over the past few years, maybe a dozen or so folks have come by, after they have rehabbed, found housing and gotten jobs to thank us for “being there” to help them when they really needed it. But for the first time, not only do we have a successful Narc-Anon grad hanging around, but we have five or six folks currently attending Narc-Anon. Our building is housing another half dozen or so folks who are also working hard to start new chapters in their lives. We are making a difference and we are literally saving lives. But to keep it going, we do need just a little bit more of that, “O mighty dollar!” as the O’Jays call it.

The largest single increase in the budget is \$3K to improve Renee’s compensation - a whopping 20% increase in pay! A big percentage increase but still hardly a pittance when considering her nearly 24/7 presence on-site and on-call. And when I consider her training and life experiences, her personality and her deep compassion for others, I can’t think of anyone else who would be more suited for the role she provides for our fellowship’s unique ministry to those most vulnerable in our city. Now, the Elders and I certainly need to do a better job helping her set boundaries, find renewal, take days off, and maybe even a vacation or two, but we also need to more justly compensate her financially.

The request for a 7% increase in pledging is probably the largest increase since I’ve been here. If you can swing it, wow, that would be great! But I also know that not all of you can. Some of you can only increase your pledge by a smaller percentage and some of you may have to give even less than last year. Each person’s situation is different, as each one of us faces different changes and challenges regarding employment, health, the need to support our families, as well as the need to support other important causes and organizations. But just in case your situation allows you to go above and beyond the suggested increase, well, please give it some prayerful consideration. But, also keep in mind, whatever the amount, whether it be money, time, or prayer, make sure you give it cheerfully.