

“We’re All In This Together”
Acts 2:42-47
October 26th 2008
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Commitment Sunday
First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI

In our meetings with the JOEL team we studied the book of Acts and this passage stood out for many of us. It talks about the church for at least a short time living out its life the way God called them to. Sharing with one another all that was given to them, and receiving from one another holding it all together as one. There was a spirit that made them one in Ministry to all the world that through their example and faithfulness, the Lord added to their number daily. Not after the next new membership class, not when they had enough for a confirmation class, but daily. One member of the team commented “what a tremendous time it must have been to be a part of the church then.”

What a tremendous time it can be to be a part of the church now! The early church recognized one key component of our life together in Christ. We are all in this together. They took the teachings of Jesus that seriously. So too, are many churches rediscovering the gift of stewardship in their daily lives. Realizing that together as the body of Christ we can accomplish many things but also support one another in the faith.

When we talk about stewardship we talk about more than money of course but today we are focusing on just that and for good reason. There’s certainly a lot of meaning to be found in money. Jesus knows that money is a major factor in the shaping of our lives, and he focuses on it a great deal in his ministry — more than he emphasizes human sexuality. In fact, his focus on money is second only to the kingdom of God.

For Jesus, money is to be used: to pay taxes to the emperor or the light and the heat bill in our case, but also to advance God’s work in the world. Money is never an end in itself, a treasure to be socked away like a precious Coin, for many years until it has grown in value 1,500 times. I am a coin collector so I have mixed feelings about this but it is true. I have no idea what some of my coins are worth. But I have them, yet their value is more out of curiosity and nostalgia for me. What would be the point of that? I received many of them from my father and grandfather and hopefully can pass them on. Today with our 50 state quarters and Jefferson Commemorative nickels and next year the penny will get fancy new designs you are going to die long before you see that kind of appreciation, and you can’t take it with you — as the saying goes, “There are no luggage racks on hearses.”

There was a man who had worked all of his life and had saved all of his money. He loved money more than just about anything.

Just before he died, he said to his wife, “Now listen. When I die, I want you to take all my money and put it in the casket with me. I want to take my money to the afterlife with me.” He made her promise with all her heart that when he died, she would put all of the money in the casket with him.

Well, he died. He was stretched out in the casket, his wife was sitting there in black, and her friend was sitting next to her. When they finished the ceremony, just before the undertakers got ready to close the casket, the wife said, “Wait just a minute!” She had a box with her, and she came over and put it in the casket.

Then the undertakers locked the casket down, and they rolled it away. So her friend said, “Girl, I know you weren’t fool enough to put all that money in there with your husband!”

She said, “Listen, I can’t go back on my word. I promised him that I was gonna put that money in that casket with him.”

“You mean to tell me you really put that money in the casket with him!?”

“I sure did,” said the wife. “I wrote him a check.”

The meaning of money is that it’s an asset, a resource for us to put to work in the world. If you listen carefully, your money is not saying “I fly, mind your business, or E Pluribus Unum.” Instead, it is saying, “Use me.”

This is a stewardship sermon, so it needs to be said that good stewards are people who use the resources that they have been given to advance the interests of their master in the world. That’s precisely what we’re supposed to be doing in the work of Christian stewardship. Everything we possess has been given to us by our loving Lord in a wild gesture of generosity. We don’t really own anything ourselves, but instead we care for the things that belong to God for as long as we are allowed to walk this earth. We relish them, we delight in them, we manage them ... but then we let go of them. So why not let go in a way that advances God’s interests?

It’s true that we have to render unto Caesar— death and taxes have been two of life’s certainties, at least since the time of Jesus, let alone Ben Franklin. But beyond this we have a great deal of freedom to exercise in the use of our assets, and it is good for us to learn how to be generous with the money we have. “Giving is the way we can feel abundant,” says writer Anne Lamott. “Giving is the way that we fill ourselves up.”

Sam Lloyd, the dean of Washington National Cathedral, has some tremendous insights into stewardship — he makes the point that since we live in a consumer culture, we need help in learning how to be generous. The poor can help us, since they tend to practice greater generosity than the rich. The Bible can help us, since it recommends the tithe — a 10-percent gift that helps us to give in a disciplined way. Money is an important part of our spiritual life, and we need to learn how to express our beliefs not only with our words, but with our wallets.

So ... what's in your wallet? What's it saying to you? And how are you going to use it?

Lloyd notices that people will give generously when they believe that there is an important mission at work, and when they see real opportunities to advance God's interests in the world. This requires being clear about the mission and ministry of the church, and adding concrete details to the invitation of Jesus to give "to God the things that are God's" (v. 21). People will give with boldness and generosity when they see mission projects that heal the sick and liberate the oppressed, at home and abroad ... Christian education programs that shape the hearts and minds of children and adults ... worship services that glorify God and uplift the people ... fellowship activities that move people from isolation to community, and from casual acquaintance to deep-spirited friendship. These are all opportunities to advance God's interests in the world, and to serve a Lord of love and generosity by living lives of love and generosity.

Our life together, as it was for the early church is still the life that Jesus calls us to live. What we are talking about is not just the money but the ministry of the church, that enables to hold things in common, share with those in need, and when we do, the Lord adds to our number daily. That is what makes us One In Christ, One With Each Other, and One in Ministry to the World.

In a few moments we will have the opportunity to reflect on what God is calling us to give. How will we make an impact as a church in this community? For some it will be easy, for others it will be a step of faith, but remember we do not take it alone, God is with us, and we are all in this together.

Amen.