

Growing Feet

Texts

**Matthew 6:19-21;
2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

A sermon preached by
James F. McIntire

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Hope United Methodist Church
Eagle & Steel Roads, Havertown, PA
Phone: 610-446-3351
Web: www.HavHopeUMC.org
Office: HopeUMCHavertown@verizon.net
Pastor: HopeUMCPastor@verizon.net

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

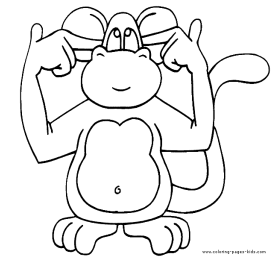
[Paul writes:] The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Matthew 6: 19-21

[Jesus says] "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."



Warning: Sermons over the next few weeks will mention money and stewardship and commitment and finances and faith and the work that God calls us to individually and corporately as followers of Jesus. If you're squeamish about money or any of those issues, you might want to censor what you hear.



The following notes were used by Rev. McIntire in preaching this week's sermon as part of our Growing Hope, Part 2 stewardship campaign. Stewardship commitment cards will be received and consecrated next Sunday, November 22.

What are we gonna do with Jesus?

- The **Committee on Lay Leadership** nominates individuals to serve as church officers or as members of committees and ministries
- I often come away from those kinds of meetings realizing if Jesus was on the list of possible candidates, I wouldn't know where to put him – would you?
- We don't want him on the **Trustees** or on a **Property Committee** do we? – he says he'll tear down the Temple and build it again in three days (John 2:19) – we can't afford that risk, can we?

- Not on the **Finance Committee** – remember last week’s story from Mark’s Gospel – he sits around watching what people put in the treasurer’s box (Mark 12:42) – can you imagine him doing that as you put money in the offering plate each week? – “Nope, not enough,” says Jesus, “you need to put in more ...”
- **Missions Committee?** – you can’t just be sitting around *talking* about mission – you have to go do something about it he says – “*Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.*” (Mark 6:8) ... ¹⁵*And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.* (Mark 16:15)
- **Church Growth or Evangelism Committee?**
Contemporary preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says: “If Jesus were in charge of an average congregation I figure there would be about four people left there on Sunday mornings, and chances are those four would be fooling themselves. Jesus would greet newcomers by saying, ‘Are you absolutely sure you want to follow this way of life? It will take everything you have. It has to come before everything else that matters to you. Plenty of people have launched out on it without counting the cost, and as you can see they are not here anymore. The other thing is, if you succeed – if you really do follow me – it will probably get you killed. Why don’t you go home and think it over? I would hate for you to get in over your head.’” [“High Priced Discipleship” in *Bread of Angels*]

- On the **Stewardship Committee?** – I don’t think so ! – he’d have us giving up *everything* we owned to follow -- *Jesus, looking at [the rich person], loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.* (Mark 10:21-22)
- So what do we do with Jesus?

Jesus as Giver

- How about we create a new position for Jesus?
- Let’s make him chair of the **Committee on Giving**
- Isn’t that what Jesus is all about? Giving.
- He asks us to give what we have and what we are – but he asks not for his own benefit – not to profit from what we can give to him – he asks us to give back to God simply because he knows that all that we have and are has come from God anyway – he asks us as one as one who is able to give his very life – he does not ask us to give anymore than he is willing to give
- **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Matthew 6:19-21)
- Jesus knows that we will give only from where our heart is – if my heart is in the right place then I give in the right way – if my heart is in the place where thieves can break in and steal what I’m all about, then my heart will be broken –

I don't want to experience that kind of heart break, Jesus implies – get your heart right and avoid the heart break

- giving is **not about the treasures of this world** – remember if we're following what Jesus is teaching, we're not even supposed to *have* "treasures on earth" (v. 19)
- yet, contrary to Jesus' teaching, we **do** have those treasures and he realizes that in this world his is an unrealistic approach
- so he then moves us on to the next option – Jesus doesn't ask us to give simply from the treasures that we have collected in the world – not the stuff where moths eat holes and rust eats away the metals – he doesn't care about the things that a thief will break in and steal – he seems to know us so well and he knows that whenever we have to part with any of those tangible goods our heart feels broken because we are so attached to them that we can't let go
- Have you ever lost some precious treasure and feel so angry or disappointed or distraught or violated that it just feels like your heart is breaking? – Jesus invites us to avoid that heart break, to avoid it by moving beyond the treasure-hording and putting our heart in a different place – find the true treasures in this life
- I've had my **car stolen 7 times** – 7 times within a 3 year period – the first one felt like such a violation that I wasn't sure I would survive it – then I realized that *it's only a car*
- ask me for my car today and I'll be glad to give it to you – not because it's old or broken down – but because it's only a car – it'll rust – God has given me the opportunity to use it so shouldn't I be willing to part with it whenever required without feeling heart broken?

Giving

- these few weeks in November I'm talking to you about giving – **Growing Hope** is what I've called this stewardship campaign – last week you should have received a brochure that helps describe our budget for 2010 – and if you haven't already, you'll be receiving in the mail in the next few days a letter and some additional information including a commitment card for your stewardship pledge which I'm asking you to fill out and bring back next week.
- Do you know why we ask for these? – primarily so we can have a better idea what our budget will look like for the new year – it makes the job of the **Finance Committee so much easier** when we return those cards – it gives the **Administrative Council** a better grasp on where our congregational heart is so we can **grow into our vision** for ministry
- **Hope** is growing – new members, lots of children and babies, activity is happening around us, new ideas brewing – its exciting, really – to me anyway, but I hope you're feeling it to
- We need to help Hope grow
- What's most important, though, about any kind of stewardship or growth campaign is that we take these few weeks to pause and think about what our personal commitment is – **where your heart is**

Money?

- “So long as clergy are cowed and anxious in the face of money and wealth, they will remain silent about the spiritual issue that touches our culture more deeply than any other.” - **Dean Hoge, expert on Protestant and Catholic clergy issues**
- So let’s talk about money for a moment ... nothing to be afraid of, is it?
- **Is giving all about money?** – No – I could care less what each person’s financial commitment is – in fact, in United Methodist tradition, the pastor does not know what each person or family gives financially – the weekly offering is counted by designated lay members and individual giving is recorded by our Financial Secretary – that person is a trustworthy and committed individual who keeps your records and is the only person who knows what you pledge and if you are keeping current with your commitment – *the only person*
- and it doesn’t really matter to any of us what the other person gives – as long as the total committed is enough money to fund what we as a church want to accomplish for the coming year, then that’s just fine – as long as we have enough money to be about the mission that God has given to us then we don’t need these cards
- do you remember last week’s Children’s Message? -- we opened a box of gifts from God and each child ended up with a Tootsie Pop, a dollar bill, and a quarter – I reminded them that one of the ways we give thanks is by returning gifts to God and that they needed to chose one of those items for the plate – they had in their hands \$15 plus Tootsie Pops – we received back in the offering plate *no* Tootsie’s *but* \$8.50! -- the kids gave better than 50%

- Money, huh? – Someone once said, “When it comes to giving until it hurts, most people have a very low threshold of pain.”
- Well, this is gonna hurt ... some people more than others ...
- **Here’s a dollar bill out of my pocket** – giving is not about money – we have to get over that notion – this dollar bill is nothing in God’s eyes
- I’m tearing up this bill and passing it around – you tear off a piece and pass it on – it’s freeing – it feels good, doesn’t it?
- A colleague of mine recently shared with me that he gave his congregation some reasons why they could tear up their pledge cards this year – one reason: ***You should tear up your pledge card if giving is more a chore for you than it is a joy.***
- Is giving more a chore to you than it is a blessing?
- A verse in the 2 Corinthians scripture – “God loves a cheerful giver.” The traditional English translation is weak compared with the force of the original language.
- *The Message* (Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase) talks about these “cheerful givers” as “pleading for the privilege of helping out” those in need of receiving some good news for once
- ***Pleading for the privilege.*** Imagine that – come annual stewardship time, this is not the kind of pleading we are accustomed to hearing. Pleading for more money. Pleading for more time and energy. That’s more like it. But *pleading for the privilege of making some Godly, gospel-bearing difference?* – **unheard of!**

- This is a direct challenge to our whole orientation about life and giving and what we do with what God provides us – it challenges whether we operate from a theology of abundance or theology of scarcity?
- So why should we want to “plead for the privilege of giving”?
- What if we begin to treat giving as if it’s a privilege? What if we begin to think of giving and stewardship as more than financial giving?
- Yes, the church needs our financial commitment otherwise we can’t move forward into the vision and mission that God calls us toward. The church needs our financial gifts because the world in which it exists requires that we exchange dollars for the goods we all want and need and use. So please give financially.
- But what I’ve been thinking more and more about is how I might give beyond my dollars and cents. We give from our purses because it is a symbolic way to offer back to God what God has given to us. Yet God gives us so many things that won’t fit in our purses.
- So how do I return to God an offering to give sufficient thanks for *all* the gifts?
- The giving to which Jesus calls us is about more than just giving money.
- **How about time?** By now, most of you know I have time management issues – lateness and such! But I have on my dresser at home a little card that I have to see each morning – “His life changed when he figured out there is exactly enough time for all the important things in his life.”

- God has given me all the time I can ever need. God has given me all the time there is.
- Can I tithe back to God 10% of my time? That would be only 2.4 hours a day. I could do it through reading, praying, meditating, service – there are any number of ways I can give God 2.4 hours a day without even denting my “oh-so-busy calendar”.
- **Food?** I have so much food in my cupboard – some of which I’ll never use. Can I figure out how to each month pass on 10% of the cans and boxes and bags of stuff that I’ll never open? Or maybe I can calculate 10% of my monthly grocery bill and give that amount to “Loaves and Fishes” across the street.
- **My house.** Can I set aside 10% of my home as a tribute to God? Maybe it means making one room a prayer space where I can be focused on my conversations with God. Maybe it means letting out one room free of charge to someone who needs shelter – a foster child, a student, a neighbor, a relative, a homeless family.
- **My car?** How about letting go of my precious car for a little time each week? Loan it to a neighbor to go to the doctor. Pick up some kids and drive them to Sunday School some Sunday.
- Think about it. How can you give this year? Present your card – your commitment – this morning ... but do more than that. Tithe a bit of yourself in service to the God who loves us so much that we have been blessed with so much.

Claiming your heart

- George Bernard Shaw once wrote: "There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it."

- **What has a claim on your heart? – better yet, “Who”**
- Our commitment – that which we put in the offering plate today – the dollars – the coins – the cards – that which we put in the offering each week is exactly about that – **it is an “offering”**, a giving to God that which already belongs to God
- **Three pastors were talking with each other about what they do with the Sunday morning offering.** One said he takes the offering plates to the church kitchen where the floor is tiled, throws the money up in the air, and what lands on the blue tiles he gives back to God by giving to the poor, what lands on the white tiles he accepts as his salary. The second says his policy is similar but he uses the stairs. He stands at the top and throws the money in the air – what lands on steps is for mission, what lands at bottom is salary. The third – a United Methodist, I think – said he throws it all in the air and figures whatever is God’s, God will keep, what comes back down is for him!
- Truth is it all belongs to God – what we offer back to God is simply a promise that God has given to us from the very beginning
- I know that my commitment has to come from wherever my heart is – your commitment is about **where your heart is** – it’s about giving from that place where our heart cannot be broken
- **God has a claim on us – if you believe that, then give – if you don’t believe that then don’t give**
- ***If God does not have a claim on your heart, then tear up your Stewardship Commitment card, tear up your commitment, tear up your heart – Give only from where your heart is***

- Our former **Bishop, Susan Morrison**, told a story about a visit to Zimbabwe. Preaching in a rural church in a very poor area, she remembered the offering as the high point of their service. She said the pastor prayed with fervent passion and excitement that God would lead people to give an offering that would be a living expression of the way God loves the world. In the congregation, Bishop Morrison noticed a certain woman. When the offering basket came to her, she looked at it for a moment, then slowly rose from her seat and stepped out into the aisle. She took the basket from the usher’s hands and placed it on the floor. Said Bishop Morrison, in a most stunning gesture of radical giving she ever witnessed, the woman stepped into the plate. The woman stepped into the plate!
- When our commitment is dedicated next week – when we bring our pledge cards forward and we present them as an offering – as more cards come in over the next weeks and we include them in our offering – as this church **grows and grows and grows** because God honors our commitment and our dedication – let us remember to stand in the basket – or the offering plate each week – let us put our whole selves into what it is we commit ourselves to
- ***because when your self is right there in that offering, that’s where your heart is as well***

What are we gonna do with Jesus? I propose that with Jesus, we step into the way we give and let us offer ourselves in our commitment.

Amen