

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
2nd Sunday of Thanks Giving, October 18, 2020
(1 Chronicles 29:10-18, Matthew 6:19-24)
“What’s Mine Is Yours”

THE BOOK OF FIRST CHRONICLES 29:10-18 (*The Message by Eugene Peterson*)

10-13 David blessed GOD in full view of the entire congregation:

Blessed are you, GOD of Israel, our father
from of old and forever.

To you, O GOD, belong the greatness and the might,
the glory, the victory, the majesty, the splendor;
Yes! Everything in heaven, everything on earth;
the kingdom all yours! You've raised yourself high over all.
Riches and glory come from you,
you're ruler over all;
You hold strength and power in the palm of your hand
to build up and strengthen all.
And here we are, O God, our God, giving thanks to you,
praising your splendid Name.

14-18 "But me—who am I, and who are these my people, that we should presume to be giving something to you? Everything comes from you; all we're doing is giving back what we've been given from your generous hand. As far as you're concerned, we're homeless, shiftless wanderers like our ancestors, our lives mere shadows, hardly anything to us. GOD, our God, all these materials—these piles of stuff for building a house of worship for you, honoring your Holy Name—it all came from you! It was all yours in the first place! I know, dear God, that you care nothing for the surface—you want *us*, our true selves—and so I have given from the heart, honestly and happily. And now see all these people doing the same, giving freely, willingly—what a joy! O GOD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep this generous spirit alive forever in these people always, keep their hearts set firmly in you."

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 6:19-24 (*Common English Bible*)

¹⁹Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit here on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. ²⁰Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. ²¹Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! ²⁴No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Money, money, money. The topic no one in church really wants to talk about, unless you have unlimited resources. It's a topic that is often treated as taboo in the Church.

Did you know that if you take all of the teachings of Jesus in the four gospels and total them up, the largest percentage of those is dedicated to money? I suspect the topic wasn't very popular in his day either. Which leads me to think that Jesus was very intentional about talking about money. In today's lesson from Matthew Jesus said, **"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."** When it comes to Christianity, this is God's main competition – not other religions, but money & wealth.

When we hear the teachings of Jesus regarding money, I guess we have an idea of how the Pharisees and temple scribes felt when Jesus made them uncomfortable. In Luke's gospel, it's written that Jesus, **"speaking to the people [Jesus said], 'Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.'"** So how do we get past our obsession with possessions?

Jesus knew how difficult it was for human beings to do what is right, to live generously, torn between our love of God and our fear of "not having enough." American humorist Will Rogers was once asked, "How much money is enough?" and he replied, "Just a little bit more." In today's lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures, David, even as he praises God and praises the generosity of his people, asks God to keep that giving spirit alive in his people. Jesus also said, **"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that."**

"I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind.

"Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

One of the things I love about today's storybook is the understanding that the giving of our tithes and offerings is a way of expressing our thanks to God. Stuart and Sam learned from their parents that everything in the world belongs to God. We've just been given the use of it while we live this life. The story reminds us that stewardship includes a view of creation as a gift from God that requires us to take responsibility for the environment. That's also an important part of how we view our financial resources, as a gift from God that comes with responsibilities.

If we think of our financial resources, our "money," as something *we* own, something *we* possess, then it's easy to fall into that sense of "never having enough." If we truly believe that *God* has shared the bounty of creation with us, then it's possible to feel a deeper sense of generosity, that spirit of living that Jesus called his followers to adopt. You may not realize it, but almost every church in this country, exists because church members of the past had that spirit of generosity. It's true, it's not something I'm making up to hold out as an ideal for us to strive towards – it's a way of living that was a part of this and many other churches in the past. If it wasn't for the generosity of past members, we wouldn't have memorial funds and church endowments (something we all depend on), and without those gifts, churches wouldn't survive through difficult times. In fact, there are Presbyterian churches across the country that are being forced into closure because of the loss of funds during this pandemic. The impact of that is causing a significant problem for our Presbytery's, Synods and the General Assembly as well. I'm going to take a minute to encourage anyone who hasn't contributed their per capita to send that in so that we can do

our part to help the PCUSA through this difficult time. This year's per capita is \$43.04. By giving our portion, we can assist in doing God's work across the nation and throughout the world.

We're not the first to experience such a difficult time. The apostle Paul shared this story in his second letter to the church in Corinth. He wrote, **"Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit. The trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians.**

This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives."

An important lesson we can learn from Paul's writings is that if our hearts are in the right place, our gifts will show it. Paul wrote, **"For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has--not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,**

**"The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little."**

Today, in our Season of Thanksgiving, our focus is not on money, but the stewardship of our lives. I could tell you all the wonderful things the church does for its members and for the community. Stuart and the Generosity Team have shared wonderful testimonies in

the past few weeks, telling us of how important the church is in their lives. But in the end, what we give and the spirit in which we give it will be judged by God, not by anyone else. What you and I feel about God is reflected in how we live and how we give.

There was a wealthy church member who never pledged and rarely made a gift to the church, and so finally, the chairperson of the annual stewardship campaign made a phone call. After a bit of small talk, the chairperson got right to the point.

"You are the chief financial officer of a very successful corporation, but you haven't pledged or donated to the church in quite a while. Wouldn't you like to help the church community?"

The member replied, "Did you know that my mother is ill, with extremely expensive medical bills?"

"Um, no," mumbled the chairperson.

"Or that my brother is blind and unemployed? Or that my sister's husband died, leaving her broke with four kids?"

"I ... I ... I had no idea."

"So," said the executive, "if I don't give them any money, why would I give any to the church?"

Why *do* we give to the church? Today, in our Scripture and in **The Case of Stuart's Ship**, we have been reminded that we give because we believe that God first gave to us – the gift of creation, the gift of love, and the ultimate gift – Jesus the Christ. Jesus gave everything he had, including his life, for the good of others. All Jesus asks of us is to give of ourselves, to be good stewards of our bodies, our family, our friendship with God, our talents, God's creation, our money, our friends and our time. In all these things, what is most important is that we give from our hearts. And don't worry! No one will know what's in your heart – only you and God.