

Sermon - Mark 8:1-10 II Corinthians 8:7-15 June 28, 2009

Money Talks - So Enough Talk About Money

5 Stepping Stones to Successful Living - Faith, Trust, Hope, Obedience, Love  
And Every One Has a Cost You and I Can Pay

Announcement –

Today as a Church family we celebrate the end of the beginning - even as last week we celebrated what we hope will be the beginning of the end. We celebrate today the end of what began 3 years ago - the 3 year Building to Share Campaign. After nearly ten years - first years of prayer and planning and hard work, of sacrifice and amazing generosity, of construction, and now a year of use of what we have, by God's grace, built - we celebrate the end of the beginning....

Because –yes – we are not yet at the end of it all. But this end of Campaign I should be celebrated. No fruit Sundaes this week, but a deep and sincere word of thanks to all who have made this possible. We have work to do to use the facilities we have in more ministry and mission. But – we know that it will not take 70 years – as it took for the Chapel - for this building to be put to full use – some days - nights actually - almost every available room is used.

And - There is good news about last Sunday – the beginning of the end of this process. We received over 40,000 in first fruits offerings. And we now have commitments for over 700,000. With nearly half of our households having responded in one way or another....

And on your own behalf - it is very much your Church – I thank you – thank you for those who will be served and blessed by what you will be doing in this place, and in mission - in the years to come.

But this morning – the thanks go to everyone who has had any part at all in the Building to Share Campaign. What a tremendous good work you have done – great people who guided the planning and the building and the remodeling – and all who gave time and money and effort to do it. And – later this year – as final figures are counted - nearly 40,000 dollars will be going out in mission support to Habitat in our area, to our sister Church in Xpujil Mexico and the clean water project there, to the Crane Children's Center in Uganda, and to the continuing rebuilding on the Gulf Coast.

Even as we move forward in faith, we can and should look back at what by God's grace and your faithfulness – you have accomplished. Very well done. Thank you.  
Amen.

I wish the Church would just stop talking about money. More than some one has voiced that view down the years of my ministry, and especially some have said it, and many more have probably thought it - as we've talked about the new campaign - Refreshed – Encircled by Hope.

Some say - The Church is always talking about money and asking for it. But the persons who claim this would be wrong. So much else goes on and is talked about in this Church – from Mission Youth Trips to the simple lessons of faith our children are taught, to housing the homeless and visiting the sick and offering comfort to the bereaved, and support to those in career transition.... And, hopefully, the encouragement we can find here week after week to be a little bit better persons tomorrow than we were yesterday. The Church talks about a lot more than money.

On the other hand, those who claim the church talks a lot about money, would be, in a way, right. If any church talked very much about Jesus, and I think that is something a church should do, then the Church has to talk about money. It would be very hard not to – because – 75% of Jesus teaching is teaching about money.

And – I'm going to be talking this morning about Jesus – and – yes that means about money. But as the sermon title suggests – I'm going to talk about money – and then – because money talks for itself, that will be enough talk about money.

And for the rest of the summer I will be talking about some of what are called the minor prophets, and their major messages of morality for modern times. The messages of these prophets that speak powerfully to the struggles and needs in our nation and in God's world – right now.

But this morning - the focus is on 5 steps for successful living - and the cost of taking them – that we all can pay.

Please pray with me.

Lord- in the wonder of this new day, your gift to us – may we have ears to hear the wonder of your word for us – may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable to you and your good word to us in Christ. Amen.

Kwami Kilpatrick, now Monica Conyers, Bernie the Ponzi man, Gov. Sanford of South Carolina, The Govenor of New York, Senator Edwards, President Clinton, Jimmy and Tammy Baker years ago - Sex and Money - Money and Sex - and the moral messes we make of our lives. King David did – and Judas, too. The Rich Young Ruler. And the woman who spoke to Jesus at the well.

Sex and money. These two factors in our lives, and how we handle them, have a lot to say about how well or how poorly we will live, happy or unhappy, faithful or unfaithful.

It speaks if just how well we will heed the prayer we pray every week – asking for God’s Kingdom to come to earth as it is in heaven.

And - Sex and money – touch powerfully on the strength of our faith, our trust, our hope, our obedience to God and the measure of Christ-like love in our lives. And this morning, as we complete one major effort of fund raising and faith focusing in our Church’s life, I am going to try to let the whole matter of money talk for itself, and then stop talking about money. And - so maybe to the disappointment of some - I’ll wait for several weeks until I focus on the prophet Hosea, to talk about sex -

In the mean time - Money - There was more than a hint about the sermon theme in the Children’s moment this morning. The point of the feeding of the 4,000 was and is – fairness. And the point of any discussion about money usually has to deal with fairness, too.

Equal educational opportunity – is about money and its about fairness. Equal access to health care – a critical issue in our society – is about money and fairness. Jobs and job opportunities, again, about money and fairness. And – bless the Apostle Paul’s heart - how right to the point he is in his teaching – in his preaching – to the Christians in Corinth. He’s about fairness.

And he’s about money, and the need to share it, to give it, if there is ever to be even a bit of heaven here on earth.

Jesus created the moment when fairness, when sharing, could be visibly seen and understood by the people he was talking to – the 4,000 hungry people. Jesus gave the people the opportunity to test themselves – to test their own faith by demonstrating his faith. 4,000 hungry people – seven loaves and some fish - and a miracle.

Jesus blessed the gifts that were there – and by example – he moved people, the spirit of God moved the people, to share – to live in those moments by : yes.... Faith, and trust, and hope and obedience – and so finally by love.

It took faith to share what little each person might have had with them out in the wilderness - It took trust that they could share and still be served themselves, It took hope that the gifts of all would be enough, And it took obedience to Jesus’ words to make it happen – and - in the end – it was an example of love. Five steps to success in that scene - but - also – to successful living – period.

And these same steps – these stepping stones to successful living – were at the heart of Paul’s message to the people in Corinth. And what Paul said has some special meaning for us as we live through this time that is as troubled and troubling as most of us have ever seen.

You can substitute some words... for Paul’s words – and it still rings true... We want you to know brothers and sisters about the grace of God ...

Grace that has been granted to the churches of Michigan - for during a severe ordeal of affliction, sounds like us - their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. Amen.

And that’s how I’d describe you. Every first Sunday this year you’ve let God’s grace work in your lives, and out of affliction and poverty – you’ve joyfully marched up here with gifts for those who have less. And you’ve given faithfully to support your Church’s ministries and missions, and given even more to secure future ministry here through the Faith Enrichment Center.

And now you’ve done almost exactly what Paul asked the Christians in Corinth should do... It is appropriate, Paul said, for you who began last year – not only to do something, but even to desire to do something – now finish doing it. And – bless Paul – He said – according to your means.

And that’s what you have done, are doing. Paul made a strong point for giving, for sharing, but he frames it right - as I hope we have always framed every request for giving.

Give – Paul said – according to your means. According to your means. If we could all just hear those words – hear and remember those words when ever we hear the church talk about money. Give – Share – Care - Should you and I. How can we not if we are in any measure at all following Jesus Christ, who gave his all.

How can we not share - but – according to our means. According to what God has already given us by God’s grace. No more – no less.

And – great words from Paul – if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable – according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Not relief for others by pressure on you. But fairness.

Did you hear that – give – according to what one has.. not what one doesn’t have. Fairness. Thank you Paul What a great good gracious concept about having and giving. What a simple solution to all the struggle over money - and food – and health care and housing and education and water resources ...and.....

Yes, Jesus knew it and tried to teach us all - fed the four thousand. which is, of course, a lot less than 6 billion or more of us on the planet now - Of whom 1/3 go to bed hungry every night. And, yes, fairness is a lot harder to achieve than to talk about. And the trouble begins pretty young. And the pretty young among us - our children - keep needing teaching, lessons, examples - to help them get the idea. And so do we. We know when we've been treated unfairly, but do we have an eye a heart, for the other person ?

Fairness. The one who had much did not have too much. And the one who had little did not have too little. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Paul. There it is.

Housing, health care, education, clean water, tax revenues, tax sharing, tax rates And - yes - even the Church budget. Fairness.

It helps me sort out my giving. And the tithe - that 10% figure from the Old Testament - helps, too. Helps me know some standard of fairness. Sometimes, sometimes, it doesn't work all that well. That fact that 1/3 of the world's people go to bed hungry every night - that nudges me to think that maybe 10% of sharing isn't enuf.

If I am struggling to lose a little weight - I obviously have a bit more food than I need. And if I'm living out the 5 stepping stones to successful living, then I need to keep thinking about what's fair. And - the five steps will help me. Do I have faith in God's love for me? Do I. Do I trust that God will provide for my needs, as God has? Do I have real hope that the God who got me this far, will lead me on and on all the way home... and so - will I be obedient to God's call to me to trust and obey God's word to me in Christ? Will I love God and my neighbor with all my heart and mind and soul and strength?

No one of us - faithful as we may be - will have the time or take the time to work those 5 steps every time we spend time or money. We should but we won't.

But if we stop, now and then, maybe that's part of what Sunday morning is all about - stopping now and then to remember what life is all about.... Where all the rush and hurry of life, all the efforts and exercises, the successes and failures, the losses and wins

May be that's what Sunday mornings are all about - good fellowship, yes. Connecting to people who care about what we care about, and care about us. Yes. And - connecting with the life force, with the guiding power, with the one - from whom we come, and with whom we exist now, and to whom our lives will finally lead - in harmony or not.

So - yes - talk about money. And what you and I have, what we share, and when we share it and why and how.... And at the heart of it - always - is the matter of fairness. I think it matters. And as I try to take those stepping stones to successful living, steps I need to take every day. I pray, don't you, that when it comes to what I have, and what I share... I can be

fair – and so faithful to the one upon whom I depend for everything I have, in this world and the next.

Yes. Money talks. Let our money talk for us. And then – we won't need to talk about money.  
Amen. David W. Robertson, Pastor