

“Looking In”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, Oct. 31, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

Scripture Text:

Matthew 6:19-24 [NLT]

OPENING

Last week, we opened this series with the idea of “Looking Back”...back into our experiences in our families of origin within which we grew up. No other group shapes us as much as that one, and so we talked about the powerful impacts those experiences had on shaping our attitudes toward money, particularly on the use of money. And we explored the fact that some of us grew up with fears related to money, particularly not having enough – running out of it.

And I was glad to learn in conversations with some of you this past week that that message had some traction for you. Many of you spent time connecting your experiences growing up with your present attitudes toward money and wealth.

Well, today, we’re taking this a step further, but instead of “looking back”, we’re going to be “looking in”. And as I said at the start of the service, we’re being invited today to become more courageous, intentional, and visionary about how we serve the world, interestingly, through what we spend and how we spend it.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Scripture lesson today comes from the center of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”. In His teaching, Jesus admonishes His hearers to “store up treasures for themselves in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal.” That is, *we are to concentrate on the riches that come with the cultivation of right relationship, love, grace, generosity.* (*Repeat that b/c we’ll be returning to it toward the end of the sermon.*) As Jesus indicates, these things are incorruptible, as Anna taught about in her Children’s Message earlier.

Maggie Kulyk and Liz McGeachy, the authors of the companion book to this series, *Integrating Money and Meaning*, which I introduced last Sunday, had this to say on the topic for today:

“The true value of monetary wealth...lies not in its power to accumulate possessions in pursuit of power and comfort. Wealth enables generosity, and a generous heart has its sights set on God.”

“Wealth enables generosity”... That simple sentence got me to thinking. Is that true? “Wealth enables generosity”? And as I thought about it, I decided that wealth and generosity *are* related to each other, but not in that simple, linear way.

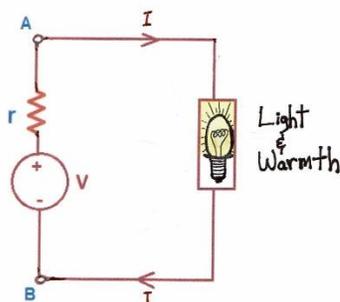
A mentor once told me, “Nothing is ever wasted in God’s economy.” In connection with that, an illustration for this relationship between wealth and generosity came to mind from my former profession. (*Many of you know I was an electric power engineer before answering God’s call to ordained ministry back in the mid-90’s.*) And if my mentor’s perspective is

accurate, God would have me foist it on you today! 😊
So, indulge me here for a bit; this will make sense, trust me.

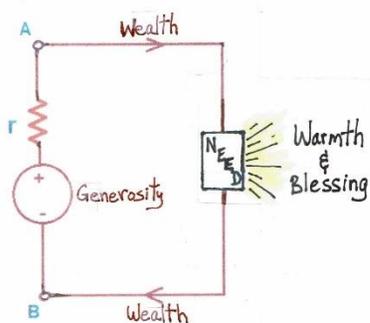
CIRCUIT ILLUSTRATION:

“The Relationship b/w Wealth and Generosity”

(*Some *ex temp* teaching on the principles presented in this simple DC circuit diagram.*)



(*The analogous ideas in this Generosity-Wealth “circuit” diagram.*)



A few ideas follow from this exploration of the relationship between wealth and generosity. Back to Kulyk and McGeachy:

“First, our use of wealth displays where our hearts reside. The uses to which we put money identify what our innermost selves care for most deeply.”

At first, that statement felt judgmental to me. But what’s interesting is that judgment can work in a self-correcting, redemptive way, which makes it a gift of grace. That is, we may become more aware of where our hearts reside by looking at what we spend our resources on and decide we want a change of heart. That can lead to our making creative changes to how we spend our resources, which can lead to a deeper connection with God.

“Second, our hearts can be made to follow where our treasure goes. When we invest in certain charitable causes and people, our hearts will expand to care for them more deeply. This means that a person need not wait until she or he can muster enough heartfelt concern for the needy before writing a check. Giving a gift, putting money toward uses that promote God’s vision of righteousness, may help a heart receive a taste of what God desires for the world.” (Both of the above quotes are from Marcia McFee’s “sermon fodder” material in support of this WDS worship series.)

SERMON THOUGHTS

(*Tell the story of George Bailey reaching rock bottom, thinking he was more valuable to his family dead than alive, and of how the angel, Clarence Odbody, intervened and saved his life.*)

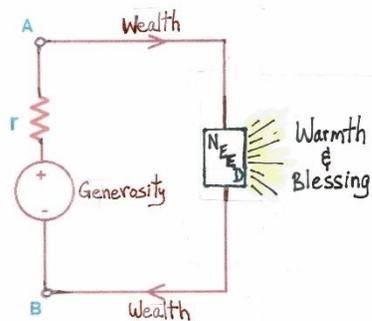
CONCLUSION

(*Make the connection for today between George and the part of the movie where he sees what the world would have been like without his having lived.*)

The contributions he made, though coming from a small reservoir, had great generosity behind them.

And so, his contributions generated more-than-expected wealth and produced warmth and blessing he couldn't even imagine.

(*Some teaching on the “return path” in the Generosity-Wealth circuit.*)



The wealth returning to George came in the form of *the riches that go along with the cultivation of right relationship, love, grace, generosity*. Yes, they brought him gifts that made up for his business shortfall, but that wasn't the point. What motivated the giving was the point, which was that George's contributions to the community around him generated more-than-expected wealth and produced warmth and blessing he couldn't even imagine.

Could that be said of you and me, as well? I think we might be surprised. And if not, well...the Good News of the Gospel is, we're never beyond the reach of the forgiveness of God and the transforming power of God's love and grace in Christ.

Amen? Amen.

Prayer Concerns for the Week

Our prayer concerns can be found on the second page of the 11 AM Worship Order:

- ✓ Go to the Church's webpage, www.fumcgj.org,
- ✓ Click on the “Worship” tab along the menu bar at the top of the homepage
- ✓ Then click on the link labeled “Order of Worship”.

Please pray for:

- Tana & Roger Foote and extended family upon the death of Tana's brother, Dick Mantlo, earlier in the month. Also for Tana, who is struggling with non-COVID-related illness.
- For Frank Wagner and family upon the death of his wife, Mary, also earlier in the month.
- For Kathy Schuster and family on the death this past week of Rev. Dr. Charles “Chuck” Schuster from COVID and for the many across the Conference who are grieving his death today.
- For our District Churches (1 every week) – This week: Johnson Memorial UMC in Dolores, CO led by Native American pastor, Rev. Norman Mark.