

Patrick Yancey

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Matthew 6:19-24

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“That which you treasure”

Opening- Large donor campaign:

- A number of years ago, I was in charge of a project to build a corporate office complex for the company I worked for.
 - That work included helping to raise money - nearly five-million dollars.
 - I was asking people to donate money to our cause, in some cases, very large sums of money.
 - Through that experience, I learned a lot about fundraising and about why people are generous with their giving.
- I've been thinking about that experience and about what causes people to donate their time, talents, prayers and money to the church or any charity.
- I've learned that there are essentially two reasons why people give.
 - The first is that people give when they have the “means” to give.
 - People give out of their abundance.
 - And the more abundance they have, the more they are able to give.
 - The second is that people give when they have the “desire” to give.
 - Something has tugged at their heart and they have this feeling- this desire- that they want to make a difference in this world and so they give.

Stepping up

- As we approach commitment Sunday, it's just next week you know, I don't mind sharing with you that the Yancey family is increasing our pledge for the year ahead.
 - For Tamra and I, life has been good this past year and we been blessed in so many different ways.
 - We've done well in our vocations and we have more disposable income than at this time last year.
 - And because we have more resources at our disposal, we are able to increase what we give.
 - And we have the desire to give more- because this community of faith means a lot to us- it has captured our hearts.
 - Our faith is nurtured here, through the relationships we share.
 - We're challenged to go deeper in our understanding of what God wants from us as we seek to love God, love neighbor and live with purpose.
 - We see so much potential for the future of this church!
 - God has been generous- we have each other, our families, our friends and our faith community.
 - We have been blessed with both the means and the desire to give and so we give.

- There is no special formula here- that's just the way this works.
- It's different for each of us too, you know?
 - Not everyone has been as blessed as we have and their ability to give may be different.
 - Each of us has to decide that for ourselves
- The point is this- Jesus encourages us towards generosity.
 - As God has been generous to us, so too are we to be generous.
- To live generously means to give- give of your time, treasures and talents
 - It means to give to something beyond yourself.

Who do we serve? (Matthew 6:19-24)

- In life that we choose what we value most.
 - Various things in our life compete for our time and resources and we have to make decisions about what is most important.
- In today's scripture from Matthew, Jesus focused on that choice- a choice of our ultimate loyalty.
 - When he says things like "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" and "No one can serve two masters", Jesus is not saying that having wealth is a bad thing.
 - What he is talking about is putting wealth at the center of your life.
 - He's talking about measuring your happiness or your success by how much you can accumulate.
 - He's saying that what you do with your resources says something about what is in your heart- who you are and what you value.
 - And he's asking the question "Who do you serve?"
 - Are you serving God or some other idol?
- Now, I don't suppose that any of us bow down and worship our bank account.
 - But what does it look like to make wealth an idol?
 - We spend money on all sorts of things like entertainment, dining out, vacations, collectibles, houses, retirement savings- all sorts of things.
 - Jesus is simply raising the question "where is your heart"- are putting as much time and energy into "investing" in heaven as into earthly investments?

Lots of Stuff in our lives

- As most of you know, I lost both of my parents a couple of years ago.
 - And Tamra and I had to figure out what to do with all of their stuff.
 - We had to figure out what would stay in the family and what had to go.
 - It was quite an undertaking, because my parents had accumulated a lot of stuff in their lifetime.
 - And for a while, I didn't want anything to go.
 - I wanted my family to keep all of it.

- All 60 or so of the teddy bears my mother had made by hand.
 - All of the camera equipment my dad had owned.
 - All of the furniture in the house- even the house itself.
 - I wanted to keep it ALL.
 - There was this sense in me that this stuff had great wealth.
- Well, in the end, there was very little that was kept.
 - We realized that to keep my parent's stuff, would be bending to an emotional attachment, rather than out of want or need.
 - We only wanted the stuff because of the happy memories associated with it.
 - But having all of the stuff my parents had in their lives, wasn't the same as having them with us.
 - And to keep it would only further clutter our lives.
 - And aside from a few things, it pretty much all needed to go.
- All of us can fall into the trap of thinking that having "stuff" can make us feel good- that it will bring happiness.
 - You hear that message constantly in today's world- that having it all is the way to be happy.
 - And that if you don't have it now, then you must not be happy.
 - And it's easy to develop an emotional attachment to stuff.
 - And we gather possessions around us and just having the stuff that we want makes us feel better, right?
 - But eventually that happy feeling wears off and we find ourselves wanting more- newer and better stuff- the latest and greatest stuff.
 - That emotional attachment is what Jesus is speaking to when he says "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also".
 - And it raises the question for each of us "Where is your heart?"
- In response to that question, perhaps we can set new priorities and begin to simplify in our lives.
- That's certainly going on around my house these days.
 - We're downsizing- going through and getting rid of stuff we don't need.
 - Just this past week, I went home and discovered that the third bedroom in our house- commonly thought of as "my junk room", had been pretty much emptied out and was in the process of being painted.
 - It seems that my junk room is soon to become a bedroom for grandkids.
 - My wife seems to think that our grandkids are more important than my stuff!
 - And I have to agree, grandkids are life-changing for sure and while it means I'm having to let go of some things, I'm OK with that.
 - I welcome the chance to simplify my life a bit.
 - And I'm pretty sure that the resources we'll get by ridding ourselves of all of that stuff, will come close to making up the increase in our giving this year.

- We all have things stored up that we don't need.
 - o What can let go of?
 - o This week, I'd challenge you to go any closet or cabinet in your home.
 - o And ask yourself "what is here that I haven't used in a while, that could help someone else?"
 - Then, take those items and give them to a charity of your choosing.

Desire first and foremost God's kingdom (Matthew 6:25-34)

- You know as we consider what we'll give to the church, it's hard not to think of the challenges and worries we might encounter in the year ahead.
- But Jesus says "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"
 - o That's not bad advice, though the thought of not worrying may feel far-reaching.
 - It's just our nature to worry and we have plenty to worry about.
 - o But the audience in front of Jesus had even more to worry about,
 - They would have been ordinary peasant people who really did have to worry about their next meal.
 - o And yet he tells them don't worry about anything.
 - He encourages them to look at the world around them and see all the evidence of God's care.
- As we examine the year ahead, rather than worry about the future, perhaps we can live into today.
 - o Can we do that?
 - o Can we worry less about tomorrow and stay grounded in being better connected with each other and with God?

Practical guidelines for giving

- In the scripture from 2 Corinthians, Paul provides us with an outline of the principles of generosity and giving.
- As he was taking up an offering for Christians in Jerusalem, he was more concerned with the spirit in which they gave, than with the amount raised.
 - o "God loves a cheerful giver" has taken on the qualities of a slogan these days, but it was not just a slogan for him.
 - It was a serious call to check why they gave- "They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure," he said.
 - o Paul offers that giving is like sowing seed- the one who sows sparingly cannot expect anything but a meagre harvest
 - But the one who sows generously will in time reap a generous return.
 - o We discovered that last week in Sandra's sermon- remember?
 - We heard about the generous return this church receives through the actions of others who lived in the moment, saw into the future and sowed seeds many years ago.

- “God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace” and “You will be made rich in every way” Paul writes.
 - Paul was a wayfaring preacher who owned nothing- no real estate, no life insurance, no retirement plan
 - Yet he wrote about being generous because God provides more than enough.
- As you contemplate your giving to the ministry of this church in the year ahead, may we be generous, not out of compulsion, but in response to the gifts with which God has richly blessed each of us.

What does generosity look like?

- So, what does generosity look like?
 - It’s different for each of us I suppose.
 - For me, it looks like a parent’s night out, where parents can drop off their children for an evening without worry.
 - Because members of this church are generous with their time
 - Generosity looks like a revived youth group.
 - Share excitement about this group- and about our covenant.
 - And it’s made possible through your generous support.
 - Generosity looks like Sunday morning, where people come to offer their praise to God for the blessings in our lives.
- Generosity is found in our giving to this church.
 - I thought I’d share a few numbers with you this morning.
 - Because I think they provide a picture of generosity.
- Leading up to our commitment next Sunday, this church’s Session members, along with the treasurer and pastoral staff gave an indication of the percentage of giving they will commit to next Sunday.
 - There were fifteen of us in all who participated.
 - The median pledge was 7%, and the average pledge was 7.3%.
 - Five givers are at or above a tithe, and one is at 11.9%.
- Now here’s the really neat part- just three years ago, the average pledge from that same group was 6.17%.
 - We are learning to live more into today and be generous in sowing seeds for tomorrow.

Conclusion

- As we look inside our hearts, do we understand that the greatest joy in life is found in giving, not in receiving?
 - Is your generosity an accurate reflection of what’s in your heart?
- When we are generous,
 - When we give with a joyful heart,
 - When we let go of the “stuff” in our lives and make giving outside of ourselves the measure of our lives,

- We walk closer with God.
- Jesus said “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”
 - Where is your treasure?

Amen