

Stewardship Sermon – October 19, 2014

WE'RE CONNECTING...TO CHRIST UMC

Jesus said: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion—packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing—will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return." Luke 6:38

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE CAPTURES AN ETERNAL TRUTH—IN THE WORDS OF JESUS: Give & it will be given to you—full measure—pressed down, overflowing—abundance! The more you give, the more you'll receive. *As many parents have said over the years: You only get out of it what you put into it (in response to complaints about school being "lame," or music lessons being "boring,")*

It's certainly true of our faith—we can't really develop a strong faith of our own unless we spend time with it—learning about the Bible—learning what Jesus actually taught and how he lived and treated other people—spending time and energy serving those who are most in need—learning to pray our way through tough times, and to claim the good times as blessings from God. In faith, we only get out of it what we put into it—time, effort, service and prayer.

Today I'm going to talk with you very directly and honestly about money, and making a pledge to give to the church, and following through on that pledge. The principle of Luke 6:38 works here in our church, just like it does in all of life. We give money to the church...and we are blessed many times in return.

We're blessed by our church staff—wonderful, creative, dedicated, caring staff people. And we know that great staff=great program

We're blessed by our facilities—beautiful space for worship, for meetings, for play, for fellowship, for rehearsals, for classes—for use by community groups as well

Here's what you need to know: Our operating budget for 2014 was \$768,238. Seems like a lot of money, and it is! It costs \$185,000 (close to \$200,000) to maintain our building and grounds, pay utilities, etc. And we spend \$368,000 to pay our pastors and staff, with half of that amount going to pay salary and benefits for our two pastors. (Thank you!) *It's expensive to have ordained clergy—and we as a congregation have consistently said that we want to invest in two pastors. I think it's needed in a church our size.*

But here's the problem: We have been approving deficit budgets for several years now. It started several years before I arrived here, and I have coaxed and prodded and cajoled our leaders to shrink that deficit every year. At its worst, our deficit was over \$100,000 in a single year. 2014 saw that reduced to \$34,000. Much better! But still a considerable deficit—one that we cannot sustain.

We've been balancing our budget off of savings. Much better than it was the year before I came—but we're still counting on using savings. Those savings are depleting!

This church went for a year w/o associate pastor—could have to go back to that again if we run out of savings—if we can't match our income to our needs.

Here's the deal:

- You say you love me & my leadership.
- You say you love Pat and his energy.
- You say you love Vanitta and having all the children here.
- You say you love our church's music and the directors we're so privileged to have.
- You say that you find worship meaningful and inspiring (at least most of the time)
- You say you love having people who care for you in your times of need — and that you love having the opportunity to care for others in their times of need.
- You say you love being involved in mission projects that help homeless teenagers, and hungry families, and families who are homeless, and people who are mentally ill and physically ill, and folks who need help with medical bills, and supplies for natural disasters all around the world.
- You say you love having the chance to learn and grow in your faith by taking classes, and being in reading groups, and fellowship groups.
- You say you love this place and these people.
- You say you believe we are doing God's work, actively following Jesus Christ as we love and serve each other and our whole community.
- **Now give us the foundation of support we need to keep doing what we're doing. Now give us the foundation of support we need to keep growing and expanding our ministry.**

This is OUR church and OUR ministry. It's not just my ministry. It's not just God's ministry. It's OUR ministry—all of us—tied together—with each other and with God.

FACTS: Annual Budget—all extras cut out— Pledged giving and regular giving Income is 85% of our income. Rest of income=building use, interest....and Savings.

FACTS: Several years ago, this congregation built new education and office space. It's beautiful! It's designed for maximum use by our pre-school, our Sunday school, our youth groups, our adult groups, our community groups, our community sports teams, our homeless families, our worship services and our fellowship times, traveling mission teams, boy scouts and girl scouts, Job's

Daughters and there is not a day or evening when there is not SOMETHING going on here!

It also cost considerably more than the money that was raised at the outset, and we carry a significant mortgage of almost \$2 million on the building. Don't let that scare you away! (Nearly scared me away when I came to interview here...) We've had no trouble making our mortgage payments and we recently re-negotiated the loan for a remarkably low interest rate. BUT it costs us \$14,500/month to make those payments. That's \$174,000/year. ***Can you imagine what we could do with an extra \$174,000/year???***

As much as we love to be in mission—to help people in need—to provide assistance in family emergencies and worldwide crises? Imagine how an extra \$174,000/year could transform our ministry to this community! It will be AMAZING when we can finally free up that money and get busy with following Jesus right out into our world—caring more deeply and more broadly than ever before. ***That's MY dream and MY vision for us! To Be the most amazing outreach congregation in the whole Wasatch valley. Wouldn't that be awesome!???***

So if you look at the pledge card that's in your packet, you'll see there's a place on your pledge card to make a pledge toward the building fund as well as the general fund. The General Fund keeps our staff and pastors here, keeps the programs running, keeps the lights on and the building maintained. The Building Fund helps us get out of debt—it pays down the mortgage so that we can get busy in mission and outreach to a world that desperately needs both physical aid AND SPIRITUAL HOPE.

If you want to know the overall Christian standard for giving, it's the 10% Biblical tithe. It's not just an arbitrary % to try to get \$ out of us. Goes way back to the Old Testament when the ancient Israelites brought the first 1/10 of their crops, livestock, produce to the Temple to offer to God.

We're obviously not the kind of church that asks for your financial statements and tells you what you should be giving to the church. **But we are challenging each other to take a step of faith.** To believe that we can live abundantly on the other 90% of our income. Or our other 95%. Or whatever you decide.

Whatever financial gifts you make—It's an investment in God's love being lived out right here at our church. And it's an investment in having a church in our community that is welcoming to all people—no matter who you are, or who you love, or where you are on your faith journey. Our giving is an investment in our own personal sense of faith and values—knowing—really knowing & trusting God—that we can live abundantly, fully and deeply, without being graspingly dependent on 100% of the money we have and earn.

Yes, we talk about money in church because the Bible talks about money and wealth and how to deal with it faithfully. We talk about money in church because Jesus talks about money and wealth and how to deal with it faithfully. We talk about money in church because we love our church—and we invest ourselves, our time, our prayers AND our money in the things that we love.

It doesn't just "happen" and it doesn't happen without you and me giving and giving more generously than we ever have before.

So I'm asking you to shake off any resistant attitude you find in yourself right now—and set aside any grudging "I hate it when the church talks about money" feelings—and just take a deep breath and imagine this church coming alive with people and mission and worship and celebration. And then pray about it, talk with your family about it, and make an investment of faith in Christ UMC. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP JOKES

The Lord's Lottery

Purpose: The 'BLT' (bottom line theory) is to get more money to find its way into the offering plates on Sunday mornings.

Plan: Three simple steps to explosive giving:

1. When the ushers bring the offering plates to the altar the pastor will place all the offering envelopes in a big round tumbler on the altar.

2. One of the acolytes will step forward and draw out one of the offering envelopes from the big round tumbler on the altar. 3. The 'winner' (person or family whose offering envelope is drawn) will receive **DOUBLE THEIR MONEY BACK!!**

Benefits: Listed below are some of the outstanding benefits (blessings, if you serve a 'spiritual' congregation) from this 'Lord's Lottery Sure Fire Stewardship Program'

1. More and more members will begin using offering envelopes.

2. When you make the offering envelopes available only to members you will be astounded at how your membership will grow.

3. Members will naturally put in more money because they know that if their envelope is drawn they will get more back (never underestimate the intelligence of your members).

4. Your worship service will reach new heights of excitement. You can imagine the excitement and drama each Sunday as the winning envelope is drawn.

5. You will have no trouble lining up acolytes because of the excitement, honor, and prestige that comes with the job.

6. Your finance committee will never again have to worry about buying those expensive offering envelope boxes. When this new program catches on members will be more than willing to buy their own. You will also discover that many will buy more than one set of envelopes.

7. Pastors will no longer have to work quite so hard on their sermons as that will no longer be the 'main event.'

8. Giving will grow exponentially as people feel a sudden renewal in spiritual fervor and heartfelt generosity!

The Sunday School teacher was just finishing a lesson on honesty. "Do you know where little boys go if they don't put their money in the collection plate?", the teacher asked. "Yes ma'am," a boy blurted out. "They go to the movies."

A pig and a chicken were walking through a poor section of the city. The chicken said to the pig, "Look at all those hungry people. Let's give them ham and eggs for breakfast." The pig said, "Wait a minute. For you, it's a donation. For me, it's a sacrifice."

The strongman at a circus sideshow demonstrated his power before a large audience. Toward the end, he squeezed the juice from a lemon between his hands. He then said to the audience, "I will offer \$200 to anyone in the audience who can squeeze another drop from this lemon. A thin scholarly looking woman came forward, picked up the lemon, strained hard and managed

to get a drop. The strongman was amazed. He paid the woman and asked, "What is the secret of your strength?" "Practice," the woman answered. "I was the treasurer of the [name your own] Church for thirty-two years!"

2 men survive a shipwreck in a terrible storm and end up stranded on a tiny desert island hundreds of miles off the nearest shipping routes.

One man panics: "OMG! We're in the middle of nowhere, stuck on this island—we're going to die!"

Other man answers: "Don't worry! I make \$100,000/month."

"They're never going to find us! We're going to die!"

"Who cares how much money you make! Your money is not going to save us out here!"

"Sure it will. I make \$100,000/month—and I tithe 10% to my church. My PASTOR will find me!"

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