

**“How Far Will You Go?” - Luke 19:1-10 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs**

Today we gather to worship God and to commit ourselves to God and the ministry of God’s kingdom on earth. For the past three weeks of this *Earn. Save. Give.* Stewardship Sermon Series by the Rev. James Harnish, we have sought God’s wisdom and heard about: Earning all you can, and Saving all you can...so that we can now **Give All You Can.** John Wesley describes giving as “the farther end” toward which earning and saving lead us. The goal of Christian discipleship is a generous life. And so the question for today is how far will you go? We are invited and challenged to grow in our generosity as our response to the extravagant generosity of God.

Zacchaeus calls us to see the connection between salvation and stewardship, the link between our faith and our money. His story underscores the deep reality that salvation is not merely a spiritual experience that prepares us for life after death. Salvation is the way God transforms every area of life so that we become a part of God’s saving work in this world. Salvation changes our hearts by changing the fundamental orientation of our living, including the way we use our money. Salvation sets us free from bondage to self-interest and opens our lives to the way the Spirit of God can work through us in the lives of others.

Salvation is about a lot more than money. But we can also say that it’s never about anything less than money, particularly in a culture that is compulsively driven by the power of money. Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, said that three conversions are necessary in the Christian life: conversion of the heart, of the mind, and of the purse! Some of us may still only be 2/3rds converted and committed! In our culture, money has such awesome power as a blessing or curse, as a gracious gift we manage for God’s sake, or as a demonic tyrant that mis-manages us for its own sake.

The story of the widow’s “mite” in Mark 12:41-44, teaches us that what matters is not the size of the gift but the impact that the act of giving has on the giver. Jim Harnish reflected on how in that story Jesus sat down and watched as people gave their offerings. He wondered if people today might give differently if they only knew that Jesus was watching. Guess what? Jesus is always watching!

The Apostle Paul shared these words with the people of Ephesus before sailing back to Jerusalem with their generous gift for the church there which was in financial need: *In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus’ words: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*” (Acts 20:35) I have always found it interesting that these words attributed to Jesus never made it into one of the gospels, but I am glad that Paul remembered them and shared them with us. And it is so true! The giver blesses twice, as the giver and receiver are both blessed. Haven’t you noticed that sometimes when we were so happy to give just the right gift and see the joy and blessing the receiver shares back at us?! I believed God is more blessed as the giver of all gifts, when God sees how we as receivers learn how to give and practice what we believe! Jesus gave his life for us. What will you give for Christ’s sake?

There is a joy that faithful people experience in knowing that their giving makes a difference in their relationship with God while making a difference in the lives of others

through the ministry of the church. You are making a difference in God's world, in God's kingdom! As you generously give, it is making a difference in you and in those who benefit from what you do. Today we invite you to not only give your money and financial resources but also your time and talents. As with tithing your finances, what might happen if you also tithed your time? There are 24 hours in a day, what if you offered two and a half hours to the work of God's kingdom each day or roughly seventeen hours a week? I'm not saying that you have to give all that time to the church. Give it also to neighbors in need or other organizations that are making a difference in this world. When it comes to time, you may not have all the time in the world, but you do have significant time to make a difference in the world.

Commitment Sunday is the day for each of us to make a decision. Zacchaeus had to decide to climb down from the tree and welcome Jesus into his home and life. The widow had to decide to put her entire gift in the offering. Now is the time for each of us to respond to God's extravagant generosity by joyfully and boldly making our commitment of time, talent and treasure. You are the best gift you can give God. Give it your all. Do all the good you can. Be all the good you can. Alleluia and Amen.

Lord, You Have Given All to Us

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 9/19/23

Lord, you have given all to us,  
In the name of Jesus.  
In his name we give all to you.  
Alleluia. Allelu.

Like Zacchaeus so long ago,  
May we be changed also,  
Sharing with others and with you.  
Alleluia. Allelu.

Below our means, help us to live,  
That to you we might give,  
The offering which to you is due.  
Alleluia. Allelu.

We have been transformed by Jesus.  
New life he's given us.  
Our sacrifice we give to you.  
Alleluia. Allelu.