

October 26, 2014
Matthew 6:19-34
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
Mary E. Baard

DID YOU KNOW?

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Did you know that Jesus talked a lot about money? The rich young ruler, Zaccheus, the widow's mite - just to name a few stories. Jesus cared about money because we care about money.

In ancient Israel, there was a big divide between the haves and the have nots. It was a long slide from the rich young ruler to the poor widow. About 10% had it all, 15% had nothing, and the other 75% lived, as we would say, paycheck to paycheck.

(www.progressiveinvolvement.com 2/20/2011)

Jesus understood that the general belief in his day was that wealth was a sign of God's favor and poverty was a sign of God's punishment for sin. Apparently, God only favored a few. Jesus challenged this perception, with his upside down kind of talk, saying such things as, "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of God!"

Jesus talked a lot about how money does or does not line up with what we say we value.

Today, as the Men's Choir sings our scripture from the Sermon on the Mount

(Matthew 6:19-34) we will be reminded that if you want to know where your heart really is, follow your money.

(Anthem by Men's Choir, "Lay Up Your Treasures in Heaven.")

SERMON

It's hard to let your light shine when worries are weighing you down. In today's section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus encourages us not to spend so much time worrying about everything.

Jesus: Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink.

This sounds good, when we're sitting here in church, but at home, with the bills in front of us, we may find ourselves muttering,

Person: Really. Have you seen college tuition these days, or those medical bills.

But Jesus doesn't stop there.

Jesus: Do not worry about what you will wear.

Person: Don't even get me started on how advertisers try to get our kids hooked.

Jesus continues waxing eloquent about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and ends with,

Jesus: Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

Person: Maybe not. But some of us sure give it a good try. Besides, what would I do with all that time and energy I spend worrying?

Jesus: Focus on the way of God. Put your time, talent and treasure there, and you will find your heart there as well.

We often talk about this the other way around. Let's figure out what we value and then invest in that. But the wisdom here is that we should see where our treasure already is and realize that is what we value whether we are conscious of it or not. Then we can make changes if need be.

I once asked a confirmation class of youth and adults what they would do with the money if I gave them each a thousand dollars. In the ensuing conversation we quickly learned what we each value. By following our hypothetical treasure we caught glimpses of where our hearts really are. Hypothetical money is one thing, but each of us has real evidence of our heart place by looking at our bank accounts. It can be very revealing.

Money is such a complicated thing. On the one hand it is only paper, or digits in

a computer these days, but it represents so much more. It gets wrapped up into our sense of self-worth, our sense of opportunity, our sense of security, our sense of generosity, even our sense of time.

Money also gets wrapped up our sense of connectedness with God. There are plenty of prosperity gospel teachers today who will tell you that God will make you wealthy if only you "do the right things." But God is not an ATM machine where, if you just put in the right card and the right pin number, the money will come pouring out.

Yet it is in God – no matter how much money we have – that we are called to center our time, our talents and our treasures.

Thank you for the ways you give of your time, your talents, and your treasures through the ministries of this congregation. You make a difference. Together we make a difference.

A couple of weeks ago the Ministry Forum met. This is the gathering of the Church Council, the staff, and all the chairs of the committees and teams in the church. These leaders shared what their groups had been doing in the past year and what their hopes and intentions are for the coming year. When they finished I said the only thing that could be said, "Wow! What wonderful ministries!"

Let me give you a flavor of some of what goes on around here.

Did you know that there is a group from our church who gathers at Mid Coast Hunger prevention every 4th Saturday to serve lunch?

Did you know that this is the 8,700 + Sunday morning worship service in this building? And now with a new roof. It sometimes catches us by surprise, but Sunday comes each week.

Did you know that there are volunteers in the office that answer the phone, greet visitors, and assist the staff day in and day out?

Did you know that the purple ribbon banners out front are a witness to our concerns about domestic violence?

Did you know that one of our members, Betsy Eaton, has been to a national UCC environmental issues event and has led a small group here to explore eco-justice matters?

Did you know there is a new third Sunday informal evening worship (5:00 pm) in Fellowship Hall where we are hearing from youth and young adults about their experiences in mission and ministry in the wider world?

Did you know

that through our support of the wider United Church of Christ our ministries and our witness extend across the country and around the world?

Did you know that Mildred Jones and Liz Newman, our historians, give tours of the sanctuary to all the 3rd graders in the Brunswick schools each year?

Did you know that there is a new group of First Parish folk meeting at Thornton Oaks using landscape metaphors to explore the soul's journey?

Did you know there is a team of about 16 people, Jane's Team, who meet with people who come to the church seeking emergency financial assistance?

Did you know that there are various educational and support groups in the life of the congregation?

Did you know there is a team of about 18 people who regularly visit those who cannot easily leave their homes?

Did you know that there are teams of parents and other adults spending quality time each week with our children in Church School, exploring the journey in the Spirit

together?

Did you know
that the children, youth and adult choirs
gather each week to practice?

Did you know
that we have an Advanced Cancer
Support Group that was founded by
four members of our congregation?
This group is helping to support Susan
Fitzgerald at this time. And we thank
them.

Did you know
that the staff is not “administrative
overhead” but “mission on the ground” for
all the ministries of FPC?

WOW ! We are doing amazing things.

In the coming week we will all receive
letters from the Stewardship Committee
inviting us to support these ministries
in the coming year, because, as we do
know, it takes money to make all these
wonderful ministries possible.

May we give of our treasures with full
hearts.