

The St. John's Pulpit

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MONEY, MINISTRY AND MISSION – Part 2

Gospel of Mark 12:41-44

Steward's Sunday

Eleventh Sunday in Kingdomtide, November 12, 2017

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In 1958, the painting sold for less than \$60; this past Wednesday, it sold for \$450 million. It isn't a photograph or selfie of Jesus; it probably doesn't resemble Rabbi Jesus at all. Yet, 500 years ago, a gifted artist, possibly da Vinci, painted Jesus as '*Savior of the World.*' And, in less than 60 years, this painting has appreciated in value from \$60 to \$450,000,000. Some investments are better than others.

Last Sunday, we reflected on a story of Jesus sitting in the Temple by the giving boxes. He was watching people during their commitment walk, giving their tithes and offerings. That story crescendos by Jesus naming a poor widow as the example of faithful stewardship. Jesus honored her for giving herself to God. He saw how God's investment was doing in her.

As a follower of Jesus, you are being converted or transformed by the Spirit of God. This process of spiritual conversion or spiritual transformation is called SALVATION. You are being saved from a life guided by selfishness to a life guided by God's character. As you mature in God's character, you increase in graciousness, compassion and generosity. Today, as you present financial commitments for 2018, you are maturing in God's character; Your commitments show God how you are maturing in grace, compassion and generosity. In a few minutes, you will tell God how God's investment of salvation is doing within you. Some investments are better than others.

Today's scripture lesson takes the roof off the early Church and lets us look inside. We get to see how they were growing in grace, compassion and generosity. The Mother Church, in Jerusalem, was suffering; Paul raised money for them for 10 years. Yet, Corinth was 2,000 miles from Jerusalem. Did God's work in Jerusalem impact Corinth? The Corinthians heard about this offering for the Jerusalem Church a year earlier. Now Paul returns with a request for them to express the character of God. Paul told the Corinthians how the poor Macedonians offered themselves to God before giving. Motivating Christians to give is possible **IF** they are maturing in God's character.

A few months ago, a fellow who oversees a non-profit lamented his work in fundraising. His organization addresses one human need. He said, "*I must raise more than a million dollars every year.*" With my tongue in my cheek, I asked how many employees worked full-time to raise that money. He responded, "*only two, plus me.*" I asked what was their limit on who they could ask. He said, "*none; we are always expanding our contact lists.*" As I pondered their golf tournament, holiday gala, speaker forums, direct mail blitzes, advertisements in magazines, concerts, etc., I smiled inside. I wanted to tell him how many needs we meet as a church without one staff person assigned to fundraising through our limited giver base. But, I knew that would not be pastoral.

In a few minutes, you will walk to this table to proclaim God's salvation at work in you. You will demonstrate how you are maturing in God's character of grace, compassion and generosity. Our stewardship theme this year is a phrase from our St. John's Church Covenant: '*Offering ourselves for God's work in the world.*' Your commitment to present your tithes to God – and your offerings beyond your tithes – proclaims that you have already given yourselves to God. God's salvation is at work in you and your commitment to God is to invest your life in God's work in the world. Your salvation shows up as you mature in grace, compassion and generosity.

Consider how your investments of MONEY in St. John's MINISTRY support God's MISSION.

- You offer sacred space for anyone to worship The Living God;
- You interpret and express God as Love in a world that blasphemes God's character;
- You help children and youth learn about God as love and God's mission for their lives;
- You comfort and relate hope to the grieving;
- You commit to God's vision for the world by collaborating for justice and peacebuilding;
- You provide counsel and companionship for the confused;
- You minister to those living with disease, loneliness and heartache;
- You help provide pathways to new life for those being released from prison;
- You assist those called to ministry as they pursue their theological education;
- You coach and mentor the young and equip all ages for ministry in daily life;
- You clothe the poor, shelter the homeless, welcome the immigrant and feed the hungry;
- You embrace the abused and provide community for the lost and lonely;
- You redeem those who need direction and you reconcile the broken;
- You welcome the estranged and lift the fallen;
- You partner with others to touch lives around the world;
- You steward resources to sustain our efforts in Christ's ministry through God's mission;
- You offer beloved community to people who are looking for God's inclusive church;
- You offer safe space for parents to leave their children in caring hands; and
- You mature in salvation growing in God's character of grace, compassion and generosity!

**Beloved, your investments of Money in St. John's Ministry strengthen God's Mission!
Some investments are better than others! Amen and AMEN!**