

Kent A. Webber  
Oct. 19, 2014

**“TRUSTING IN . . . GOD OR WEALTH?”**

**Psalm 49, Luke 12:13-21, 32-34**

**I want to talk with you today about an important Christian discipleship practice – that of financial giving. It’s so important in fact that Jesus talked more about money than about prayer! Next week is Consecration Sunday, when we’ll invite our members and those who have made PCN their church home to fill out an “Estimate of Giving” for 2015. Those “Estimates of Giving” assist our governing board, the Church Session, to plan responsibly for the year ahead.**

**I think there are some compelling reasons to financially support PCN! This year’s theme “Supporting God’s Children” is a reminder that we have enlarged our church staff to better serve the children and youth of our congregation and community, while continuing our generous support of numerous mission projects in our community, region, and around the world. Personnel and Mission causes together comprise nearly 85% of our total church budget. We have been using some earnings from our Endowment**

**Fund to pay for our larger staff, but that support decreases each year and evaporates a year from now. Our goal this year is to trim our use of earnings from the Endowment Fund to no more than \$9k for 2015, half of what we needed for this calendar year!**

**Speaking of the church and money, a church secretary once answered the phone and the voice on the other end said gruffly, “I want to talk to the Head Hog at the Trough!” Shocked, the secretary said, “If you are referring to our pastor, you need to speak of him in more respectful terms, and unfortunately he is not here at the moment.” The man replied, “Well that’s too bad because I wanted to speak to him about making a \$50,000 donation in memory of my late wife.” The secretary responded, “Hold the line, the BIG PIG just walked in!”**

**I could spend lots of time talking about the need of the church to receive your generous support, but I think the most profound reason to give is our need as Christians to give! Giving, according to scriptural teaching is one of the important hallmarks of being a follower of Jesus!**

**Rampant materialism is a powerful reality in our culture! It is so pervasive that some years ago a Soviet KGB training manual, acquired by our FBI states, “The average American regards money as the only thing which can ensure his personal freedom and independence and make it possible for him to satisfy his material and spiritual needs.”**

**A report released earlier this month by the Chronicle of Philanthropy shows how increasing wealth inhibits giving. It documented that people in the Bay Area gave a smaller percentage of their income to charity than residents of most large cities. Of the nation’s largest 50 metro areas, SF and San Jose ranked 45<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> respectively in 2012. Not only that - a summary of the report said “the wealthiest Americans are giving a smaller share of their income to charity, while poor and middle-income people are digging deeper into their wallets.” In other words, as income rises, the percentage one gives to charity falls.**

**Today’s Psalm, #49 is a wisdom psalm. The writer is wrestling with his feelings of envy toward arrogant, wealthy people who boast about what they own, people who persecute**

**the faithful, and who trust in their wealth as their so-called god. The Hebrew verbs translated “trusting” and “boasting” in vs. 6 are used elsewhere only with reference to God. So here they are used sarcastically to show that some people worship their wealth as if it were a god. (read text – pg. 518 OT)**

**The writer makes a case that it is foolish, unwise, short-sighted to put ultimate trust in wealth rather than in God. This is because death is universal; it is a state we enter without being able to bring anything with us, and finally death is permanent.**

**“Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish.” We are all mortal! That sentence is repeated twice in this wisdom psalm for emphasis. We read in vs. 7 and 8, “Truly, no ransom avails for one’s life, there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice that one should live on forever and never seen the grave.” The OT allows that in certain court cases where the penalty of death was stipulated, a “ransom for life” could be paid to save the convicted person (Ex. 21:28-32). That doesn’t hold true as a way to purchase freedom from death**

however. **Wealth used as a strategy for immortality simply doesn't work.**

**Second, the writer also says that wealth as an immortality strategy doesn't work because we can't take our wealth with us!**

**As Mike Umbenhaur used to say, "You never see a U-Haul following a hearse!" In the words of the psalmist, "They leave their wealth to others" and "when they die they will carry away nothing; their wealth will not go down after them" (vs. 10b, 17).**

**Old Cyrus Baker was the richest man in town! When he became terminally ill, there was lots of speculation about the extent of his wealth. When he died, one of the town busybodies made it his business to run to Barker's lawyer and ask, "How much money did old Cyrus leave behind when he died?" The lawyer replied simply, "All of it, my friend, he left it all!"**

**Third, while this life is just a few decades in length, death is permanent. The writer says of humankind in vs.11, "their graves are their homes forever, and their dwelling places to all generations." In death those who trust in their wealth "will go the company of their ancestors, who will never again see the**

**light.” Life is fleeting while death is final and permanent.**

**Therefore it makes no sense to spend our lives amassing wealth and centering our lives around and seeking happiness from what we possess.**

**Jesus brings much the same message in the passage we heard from Luke’s Gospel. In the Parable of the Rich Fool, a wealthy farmer has a bountiful year and his harvest is so vast, it outstrips his storage facilities. To provide for his own security, rather than giving away some of his harvest, he constructs bigger barns. He then feels secure. But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ Jesus agrees with the psalmist – death is inevitable, you can’t take anything with you when you enter the realm of death, and while life is fleeting, death is permanent!**

**A wealthy man who was a free spirit requested a very special burial and his wishes were honored fully! Donned in his favorite sport coat and hat, with a cigar in his mouth, he was sitting at the wheel of his brand new candy apple red Cadillac**

convertible, with his speedometer set at 90 mph, and was then lowered into the over-sized grave. One of the gravediggers standing nearby said quietly to the other, “Man, that’s living!”

In answer to the feelings of envy many have of wealthy persons who trust in their wealth rather than in God, the psalmist assures his readers that the time of boasting for the wealthy will be short-lived; death will strip them of their wealth and leave them in Sheol, the land of the dead, forever.

After speaking of those who trust in their wealth, the psalmist also alludes to those who trust in God instead. For the former “no ransom avails for their lives.” And yet the writer makes this bold faith-claim, “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.” This is one of the earliest scriptural affirmations of God’s power to bestow the gift of life everlasting on people of faith. Jesus picks up on this “ransom” language and taught of his approaching death, “The Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). At this point the psalmist can’t explain how God will

**“ransom his soul from death’s power” but he remains confident God will give him new life after death.**

**As followers of Jesus, how can we break free from the greedy, materialistic culture which surrounds us, and which tempts us to trust in our wealth rather than in the living God? How can we declare our independence from the spirit of acquisitiveness and covetousness?**

**While Psalm 49 only implies an answer, Jesus gives us explicit instructions. In the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus describes those who store up treasure for themselves, but are not rich toward God (Luke 12:21). And then just a few verses later he tells his hearers how to be rich toward God, or as he puts it, “how to acquire treasure in heaven.” How do we do that? By giving, charitable giving!!**

**After all, what better way to defeat the tendency to worship and hoard what we own, than to purposely give a significant portion of our income away each year!! So that is the challenge before us! Do you trust in what you own, in your financial assets, or in the one living and true God?**

**A week from today on Consecration Sunday we have the opportunity to demonstrate our trust in God by our giving for year 2015. By your giving you can help us support God's children, continue many wonderful mission projects, but perhaps more important for your own life, you can grow your trust in God!**

**Let us pray: Generous God, we give You thanks for these words of warning and challenge from the psalmist and from Jesus – the warning about trusting in our wealth, the challenge of demonstrating our trust in You by the way we handle our financial resources. Give us the wisdom not to worship wealth, but to generously give a significant portion our incomes away each year so that we might grow in faith and become your faithful followers. Through Christ the Lord we pray. Amen.**