



Grand Blanc UMC

Are We Really Talking About Money, Again?!

By: Pastor Brian West

fact! While I believe very strongly in the mission of the church, I admit that I don't always like the way that the Christian church lives into that mission. On the one hand, the church claims a mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, though, we find ourselves getting upset when folks don't conform to an approved list of favorite hymns and dress codes. Something about that just doesn't seem terribly sincere. Perhaps what we *really* mean is that we want to make disciples of Jesus Christ that look more like we do? Or, how about when the church puts together its list of top sins, some of which we self-determine, and then legislate who is in and who is out. Maybe we've failed to fully appreciate Jesus' reminder to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31), to remove planks from our own eyes (Matthew 7:5), and "do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). My skepticism (healthy and honest, I believe) could go on and on. But, at last, here is where we get talking about money.

Admittedly, I'm a bit of a skeptical pastor when it comes to church matters. Don't get me wrong – it's not that I don't believe in the church's mission. Just the opposite, in

Money is an absolutely necessary resource for effective ministry! The early Christians understood this, and I suspect that most contemporary Christians (you and I) know this too, at least instinctively. Programs, staff, tangible resources like buildings, technology, etc. that are all vital to meaningful and effective ministry require funding. For millennia, this has been achieved by each member of the faith community contributing a portion of what they have in order that their contribution, combined with the contributions of all others, would be sufficient (more than enough) for the ministry of the church (Acts 2:42-47). Over centuries to follow, the church grew in wisdom, discovering that the Old Testament passages about giving first fruits (Deuteronomy 26:2) and tithing 1/10th of our income (Leviticus 27:30), might actually have something to teach us about the spirituality of our giving and contributions. To be fair, the church has also had ethical blunders related to financial giving (*Google "the protestant reformation and indulgences", sometime*).

But, somewhere along the line, the global church got *remarkably* lazy when it came to really teaching and understanding the spiritual values of contributing to the common fund of ministry. It became less about a passion for the mission and ministry of the church, and more about a duty – an assumed responsibility of the "good Christian" – that contributing, giving, tithing – whatever you might want to call it – was simply what "good Christians" do. I once heard this articulated with a "Field of Dreams" analogy. The church became accustomed to an, "If you build it, they will come" approach to ministry and finances: *good Christians will just come to church; good Christians will just give to the church; good Christians will serve on committees; and so forth*. Reasons and passion took a back seat to expectation and obligation. In other words, churches no longer felt the need to prove and demonstrate why their mission and ministry were worthy of an individual's contribution. People should just give to the church, because "that's what good Christians do," right? (*Hopefully my sarcasm is being laid on thick!*)

And so, this is why I love to preach a stewardship series! It gives me an opportunity to set the record straight for about four weeks that the church's mission ought to be compelling and that our spirituality can grow through the discipline of giving. And so, when I ask people to make a commitment to give to the church for the coming year, I ought to make it clear that the ministries of this church are worth giving to. When I invite people to be generous as a response to the gratitude we'll be talking more about, I better be tapping into my gratitude, as well, so much so that I am tithing right along with you (*which we do, and that's a whole other story! – check out this week's Testimonial Video on the "Gratitude and Generosity" section of our website*).

So, yes. We will be talking about money, again! My hope is that my approach is a bit different, and that you feel less turned off by the annual fall stewardship conversation. I also hope that you come out of it feeling proud of the mission and ministry of your church. So let us dive in, explore our gratitude, and see what we, the people of Grand Blanc United Methodist Church, can really do in this world to exercise love, hope, and grace to enrich all lives!