

McCabe United Methodist Church
Stewardship (part 2): Are we Untied or United?
John 21:15-19
10-21-12
Pastor Ray Baker

Have you ever noticed church bulletins occasionally contain mistakes? Yes, even here at McCabe we do make mistakes. Here are a couple of doozies from other churches:

- “Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.”
- Thursday night will be a potluck supper, prayer and *medication* to follow.
- For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery across from the sanctuary.

One of the mistakes I’ve made in a church bulletin is identifying our denomination as: The “Untied” Methodist Church. (Spell check didn’t catch that mistake.)

In today’s Gospel reading, the risen Christ is asking Peter if they are “United” in their mission. He wanted to know if Peter was on board.

Allow me to set the scene for today’s passage. After Christ’s resurrection, a group of seven disciples had gathered on the beach to go fishing. They had worked hard all night long, casting their nets into the water. In the morning a stranger appeared on shore and asked: “How is the fishing? Have you caught anything?” I’m sure the disciples were sore and tired from working all night. They were probably a little “sore” when they responded: “No. Not a thing.” Then the stranger said: “You need to change what you’re doing. You need to approach this from another perspective. Try casting your net on the other side of the boat.”

I imagine Simon Peter, who wasn’t known for having a calm demeanor, muttered something under his breath, something like: “Who do you think you are? We’ve been fisherman most of our lives. We know what we’re doing. **We don’t need to change.**” At least that’s what I imagine happened.

Then they cast their nets on the other side of the boat, which is a simple technical change they could accomplish without much thought or effort. But this simple change...changed everything. They caught so many fish they were barely able to hoist the net.

A little later, Jesus and the disciples gathered around a fire on the beach, eating bread and the fish... a meal reminiscent of Jesus feeding of the 5,000. In that story Jesus take a loaf of bread and a couple of fish and he feeds the entire group of people. Some 5,000 people! In this story Jesus starts with nothing and gives the disciples an overabundance of fish. More than they could possibly eat. Since the Gospel of John doesn’t tell a story about Jesus serving the last supper, (John’s gospel replaces it with the story of the foot washing) this story becomes the last breakfast. According to John, this was the last time Jesus

would gather with his disciples to share a meal...a simple meal of bread and fish...the staples of their lives.

It was in this setting that Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love me more than these." Peter said: "Yes, Lord I love you." Jesus asked Peter three times: "Do you love me?" Each time Peter responded "Yes," and Jesus gave him a simple direction: "Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep."

In these moments Jesus was offering Peter an opportunity for redemption...to return to a good and right relationship with Jesus...to be made complete/whole once again. This was an opportunity for Peter to proclaim that he was still a follower of Jesus and he was faithful to all he had taught them. It was an opportunity to show his spiritual strength.

When we read this story I believe we should think of Christ sitting down at our breakfast table and he is asking us: "Do you love me?" (Pause) "Do you love me?" No, really: "Do You Love Me?" Do you want to participate in a living breathing relationship with me? Do you want to follow my teachings and experience what it means to be in a relationship with a living God?

This is a very important question. Especially when you consider this quote by an anonymous source:

"Middle-class Americans worship their work, work at their play and play at their worship."

Here at McCabe, we have identified the way we will participate in a "living...breathing...relationship" with God. It's found in our Purpose Statement: **"Christ calls us to Worship, Grow, and Serve."**

This isn't just a cute statement. It's not something to be muttered once in a while. It's a statement that identifies our Purpose as a church...it gives us Direction to follow the path of Discipleship. We understand that as disciples...as followers of Christ...we are called to participate in an intentional relationship with a living and breathing God by Worshiping, Growing, and Serving in God's name.

That's why we were so excited to discover our average worship attendance has grown by 30 in the first six months of this year...and we're on track to record our fourth straight year of growing worship attendance. This is a sign our church is growing spiritually! *It's all about spiritual growth...it's about our connection to a living...breathing God!*

Another way we're growing spiritually is through our "Family Link." It's one of the ways we can worship God at home. We gather as a family (traditional, blended, single, divorced, or widowed) to: "Share, Read, Talk, Pray, and Bless" one another. It only takes fifteen (15) minutes a day.

During our church worship services we sing praises to God; we greet one another in the Spirit of Jesus Christ; we offer our prayers and affirmations of faith; we give the gifts of our tithes and offerings; we read scripture; and we proclaim the Good News. We don't think of it very often but *even giving our Tithes and Offerings is a spiritual act.* Unfortunately, it's sometimes done with the callous attitude of paying a light bill or buying a tank of gas.

Just as Jesus asked his disciples to cast their nets on the other side, God is asking us to take a different approach to presenting our gifts. Giving our tithe and offerings is an opportunity to proclaim our love for the Living...Breathing God. Presenting our offering is a spiritual activity.

Listen to what three well known people have said about giving:

“The key word of the dedicated Christian should be ‘give.’ Charitable contributions speak eloquently of your unselfish Christian generosity.” — **Billy Graham** (1918-), American evangelist

“If you haven’t got any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble.” — **Bob Hope** (1903-2003), American comedian

“Giving frees us from the familiar territory of our own needs by opening our mind to the unexplained worlds occupied by the needs of others.” — **Barbara Bush** (1925-), former American first lady

I believe there is a direct connection between our spiritual strength...which is our love of God...and our attitude toward giving.

Since the beginning of our stewardship drive Pastor Rick and I visited with a number of people about the needs of our church. During those conversations people have responded by sharing their love for God and this Church. Every one of these people affirmed our need to stop paying so much on interest, so they understood our desire to pay off the debt.

In this campaign we do need a few people to step up and give a large gift. We can’t meet our goal without you. If God has richly blessed you then we need your prayerful support and willingness to sacrifice.

AND it is equally true that we need everyone’s prayerful support. We need everyone to step up to the plate and give sacrificially. It may be with the gift of the widow’s mite, but in these instances even a gift of a dollar a year or a dollar a week is pleasing to God.

We know the majority of us can give much more than a dollar a week. There are a lot of us who can give \$5 a day *or more* to this effort. As Pastor Dave said last week, there are a lot of people who spend \$5 a day for coffee at Starbucks...*without even thinking about it*. We need people to “Unite” behind this effort and give \$5 per day, five days a week, for three years. Through their commitment they will be able to give a gift of \$3,900 over three years.

If you think this is too much to ask, you should consider the teachings of the bible. The Old Testament teaches we should give a tithe of 10% and our offerings are over and above the tithe. In the New Testament Jesus teaches if we have two coats we should give one to our neighbor who is in need. The book of Acts it teaches Christians’ are called to give all that we have and use our money for the common-good.

So ***IMAGINE*** what would happen if 300 families agreed to “Unite”... to commit...to give \$5 per day, five days a week, for three years. *What would this act of worship produce? A gift of \$1,170,000.*

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement said this about money (Sermon 50):

It is therefore most urgent that God’s people know how to make use of their money for his glory. All the necessary instructions can be condensed into 3 simple rules:

- GAIN ALL YOU CAN
- SAVE ALL YOU CAN
- GIVE ALL YOU CAN
 1. Will I be acting, not as an owner, but as a steward of the Lord’s goods?
 2. Am I acting in obedience to the word of God?
 3. Is this expense a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ?
 4. Do I believe that this expense will bring reward at the day of resurrection?

So...as you think about all I’ve shared this morning I have three questions for all of us.

1. Are we “United” in our love for God?
2. Are we “United” in our calling to be followers of Jesus and his teachings?
3. Are we “United” in our commitment to support the church?

Please, take it to the Lord in prayer and seek God’s guidance before you fill out your pledge card. That is all we can ask of you. Amen.