

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Good Morning Friends!

We begin a new series focused on our Wonder-full life here within the Saint James faith community... where we are loving and serving God and God's people. As any long-time member can share, we are about to begin our 228th year of ministry of loving and serving God and God's people.

There are few things that have this kind of longevity. One of the contributing factors to longevity is commitment... commitment to purpose, commitment to mission, commitment to 'why' we exist as a faith community ...truly a commitment to loving and serving so that transformed lives are transforming lives.

Without a doubt, resources of time, talent, and treasure are needed to sustain a community... Saint James has been blessed with many servants who have shared their love of God through their service to God's people through this church. IN FACT, PLEASE BRING PHOTOS OF LOVED ONES OF THE CHURCH OR YOUR FAMILY WHO NURTURED AND SHARED THEIR LOVE OF GOD IN YOU. WE WILL USE THEM IN WORSHIP IN THE COMING WEEKS.

The question is, how will we continue in a season of change in our community, our nation and our world?

So for the next few weeks we will engage in scripture that challenges our commitment to living as Wonder-Full people of God, believing that God is with us in all seasons and God desires for us a life that is full of wonder. For we trust in the words of Jesus (John 10:10b), *'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly'*.

Today's scripture reading from Matthew addresses the concern about how we use our money. Seeking to trap Jesus in blasphemy or treason, Jesus' response puts 'money' in perspective... and it's a complex perspective. The people of 1st century Palestine live within the oppressor's systems of money and the Romans have the power to take it. But throughout Jesus' ministry, he indicates that ALL things are within the realm of God. Even the decisions made about what to do with money have spiritual implications. The coin had the inscription that emperor was divine. Jesus scriptures taught God made humanity in image of God.

We, too, exist in a time when we live inside of a system of money that is not always just or fair or equitable. And yet, how we live within that system is a matter of spirituality and faith formation because it affects our sense of call to do as much good in the world as we can.

To deny this difficult, complex relationship with money and live in fear of facing it can rob us of our ability to use it for good. Beginning to understand our fear requires a looking back at the roots of this fear with compassion for ourselves because our relationship involves not only the family systems we grew up in, but also the history about how to assign “worth.”

Some of you are aware, I love learning and I love books. (The team who helped me move into the parsonage can attest to this! In fact, my Kindergarten teacher reported to my parents this very fact... I blurted out... 'Books are my friends!' on the first day in class.

And I have been wrestling for some time with the idea of working on a Doctorate in Ministry. I put it off time and again because of more immediate goals... like a move to a new appointment; like ordination. I was just about to commit to a program in Church Leadership & New Faith Expressions when a letter of invitation arrived to participate in the Financial Leadership Academy, offered by the Mid-Atlantic UM Foundation.

I had to weigh a lot of factors to make a decision... all of which involved time, talent, and resources.

I just completed the first of eight sessions... me and 99 other UM clergy from BWC, EPa & PenDel Conferences at this third Financial Leadership Academy.

The first homework assignment (other than reading three books and taking action steps) is to look back and construct an autobiography of money. In this exercise we identify our personal history with money, our family history with money, our present situation with money, and our anticipated future with money.

Growing up as the oldest in a family of 6 kids, I understood there were challenges in 'making ends meet'. My parents lived through war times, their parents had to survive through the Great Depression, and So the stories & values of using money wisely and working to get things done were imparted to me. My father grew up as the seventh child of a tenant farmer;

my mother the daughter of a jack of all trades business owner. So I understood the challenges of making ends meet... yet we seemed to have enough... food, clothes, books, toys, beds, a place to live and to play. We had enough...and enough to share with any kid in the neighborhood, at mealtime, at bedtime... we had enough.

The other significant influence on my life was girl scouting... the opportunity to learn & do things full of adventure, in the midst of God's creation, and surrounded by amazing beauty. It was the place, outside my family, that shaped passions for music, learning, and sharing what I learned. As I began to share what I learned within scouting, I had no time to work...to earn money for college, except for summers.

Thus, to be the first in the family to go to college, I needed help. I got help from my parents, amazing and unexpected help from the scouts that I served, and the opportunity to receive a work/study arrangement to be on campus. I trusted there would be a way, my parents trusted there would be a way, and we worked hard to serve others along the way.

What's the Fuss...you might ask. It's this... In God's economy, there's always a way for abundant life, a wonder-full life. When we approach life with a sense of scarcity, we run short, we fall short, and we become discouraged and fearful. We can, in fact, do harm instead of good.

John Wesley sought to counsel the people as he spoke about earning all you can unless you are bringing harm to self or others; save all you can so you can provide for those who do not have but not to overprovide so to not create children of the devil; and to give all you can. In fact, JW's last public sermon was about the dangers of money; it was sad, he wrote, that he could count on one hand those who listened – to give all you can.

While we may reference a classic movie and its characters, it is my prayer that through this series we will gain fresh perspectives around all the ways we use/get/give and assign meaning to money so that generosity feels right and full of purpose in this faith community known as Saint James. So I challenge each one of us to reflect on our autobiography of money. Is it one of giving in abundance or scarcity? Where are the areas of discomfort or need? Where are the areas of strength? May it be so. Amen.