

McCabe United Methodist Church

Earn. Save. Give.: John Wesley's Simple Rules for Money Series

“Give All You Can”

Sermon on Luke 19:1-10 & 21:1-4 (10.22 & 10.23.16)

Pastor Jenny Hallenbeck Orr

Holy God, you give us words, you guide our thoughts, and you fill our hearts. May these words I speak be pleasing to your ears, may our thoughts be formed in your image, and may our hearts be ever tuned to you; in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Pig and Chicken are walking down the road, talking about life and about their plans for the future. After a pause in the conversation, Chicken stops, turns to Pig, and says, “Hey! We should come up with a restaurant idea and be its primary investors!”

Pig says to Chicken, “Do you think we could make it work?” Chicken responds to Pig, “Of course we could make it work; between us, we've got the skills *and* the resources necessary.” Pig nods his head and says, “Okay, okay... let's keep talking about this. Any ideas on what kind of restaurant it should be?”

Chicken replies to Pig, “Yes. I've got the perfect idea.”

Pig says, “Oh? What's your perfect restaurant idea for the two of us?” Chicken replies to Pig “I'm not sure exactly what we'd call it, but we'd definitely be serving eggs and ham.”

With that, Pig stopped short, turned to Chicken, and proclaimed, “Whoa, whoa, whoa – no way! We are *not* going to invest in a restaurant that serves eggs and ham!” Chicken replies to Pig with surprise, “Why in the world not?”

Pig then says to Chicken, “Because, for you, investing in an eggs and ham restaurant would require simple donations...whereas, for me, it requires a total commitment.”

That's a funny little story I heard years ago...but the message is powerful: simple donation versus total commitment. Do we give just a little bit of ourselves or are we all in? This funny little story inspires a serious question

for us – and not just because it has obvious connections to our financial stewardship series!

Do we give just a little bit of ourselves or are we all in?

This is a question for so many parts of life: are we “all in” when it comes to our marriages and our families...are we “all in” when it comes to our jobs or volunteer work...are we “all in” when it comes to our friendships...are we “all in” when it comes to our love of God and neighbor? Are we “all in” as disciples of Jesus Christ?

Do we give just a little bit of ourselves or are we all in?

Today's Scripture readings offer us a couple of different stories of what it can look like to be “all in”... the story of Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19 and the story of the poor widow in Luke 21.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector and, as such, he was not a particularly popular guy... So, when Jesus made a point to connect with him, town folks grumbled and judged: *why would Jesus choose to connect with a sinner?* Yet, the fact that Jesus *wanted* to connect with Zacchaeus was exactly what inspired Zacchaeus to a new kind of generosity.

Zacchaeus knew everyone hated him for being a tax collector.

Yet Jesus connected with him anyway. Jesus made Zacchaeus feel worthy and loved. So he climbed down that sycamore tree, joined Jesus, decided to give half his possessions to the poor, and decided to make *right* any of his financial wrongs.

In chapter 19 of Luke's Gospel, Zacchaeus went *all in* with Jesus. It's a great story and a powerful example of how the love and welcome of Jesus Christ inspires us to respond in new and generous ways.

Then, in chapter 21 of Luke's Gospel, we met the poor widow who gave all she had to the temple treasury. Her gift was not a simple donation: it was a sign that she was *all in* for God.

Though she was poor, though she was a widow, she gave sacrificially... and people don't give sacrificially on a whim. People give sacrificially out of a deep love for God and out of a deep sense of gratitude for life and all its blessings – even when life has not always been easy.

John Wesley, one of the founding fathers on the Methodist side of our United Methodist family tree, had very clear ideas about how Christians should use money. In fact, in the mid-1700's, John Wesley outlined three simple rules for how Christians should use money:

We should *earn* all we can. We should *save* all we can. We should *give* all we can. Thus the title of this series: *Earn. Save. Give.*

Three simple rules for money that are simple to remember... but that are not always so simple to put into practice! Relating well and faithfully with money is a growth area for many of us and that's okay.

God grants us grace and forgiveness where we have erred with money... and God also sends the Holy Spirit to encourage us to grow in our ability to earn, save, *and* give.

In his sermon last weekend, Pastor Mark talked briefly about “the culture of now.” The “culture of now” is a chronic, emotional and spiritual illness in our society – an emotional and spiritual illness that keeps us focused on immediate returns.

That new pair of jeans we saw? That new video game, that night out on the town, that new vehicle, that new home, etc...? We see it all, we think about it all, we want it *now*, and we don't want to think too hard about whether we can *afford it now*.

So, instead of thinking through our financial reality and perhaps telling ourselves “no” or “not yet,” we pull out the credit card with the balance that keeps creeping higher and higher or we over-extend ourselves with a higher mortgage or another monthly payment.

We spend more than we should *in the now* and limit our ability to appropriately save for the future. Spending more than we should *in the now* also seriously limits our ability to give all we can. And, as it turns out, I know about this rather intimately.

When I became a full-time pastor, I started tithing – I started giving 10% of my income back to God through the church. I love knowing that the first 10% of my income goes right back to God in thanksgiving for all God has blessed me with. But, for years, despite my tithe, I was wildly irresponsible with the remaining 90% of my income. For years, I was all about the *culture of now*.

I didn't budget and, relative to my income, I drastically overspent on travel, shopping, and dining out... the result of which was not saving enough for my quarterly income tax and social security payments and, instead of paying *down* my credit cards and student loan, my credit card balances went up while I was barely making a dent in my student loans.

After years of that, in the spring of 2008, the stress of overspending got high enough that I realized I needed to make some changes. So, I signed up for Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace University* class at my church and, through that class, God saved my financial life.

I started budgeting, I cut up all my personal credit cards, and I prioritized my spending so that much of that “extra” money I'd been using for travel, shopping, and dining out got shifted toward paying down my debt.

Now, years later, not only have I paid-off all my consumer debt, but also the stress I used to feel over my finances has virtually disappeared. Plus, my ability to give has grown... though that's not just because I'm better managing my own personal finances.

As many of you are aware, I got married this past January and so now *my* income is not the *only* income in my particular household; when my husband, Derrick, and I got married, *my* household tithe became *our* household tithe and I am so grateful.

Of course, I'm so grateful to have fallen in love and to have married a wonderful guy... but I'm also grateful that, with two incomes in our household, we are able to give even more to God through McCabe – because I'm terribly excited about what God is doing here. And I love investing in what God is doing.

Under the leadership of some phenomenal staff and unpaid servants, our prayer ministry is expanding, our children's ministries are growing, small group ministries are developing in new ways, and more McCabe folks are interested in mission work beyond our walls.

The Holy Spirit is breaking through at McCabe; I hope you can feel it and I hope you will expect the Spirit to keep breaking through!

In the last couple of days, folks on our McCabe mailing list received a letter and an Estimate of Giving card for 2017. The letter asked you to prayerfully consider what you are being call to give – to *invest* – in the work God is doing through McCabe.

We invite you to fill out that Estimate of Giving card and then to bring it with you to worship next weekend. During each of our four worship services next week, we'll come forward to the altar and we'll consecrate – we'll surrender – our offerings and our Estimate of Giving cards.

I love this act of coming forward to the altar because, in doing so, we are physically, tangibly, surrendering our very *selves* to God.

I love Consecration Weekend *every* year, but I am particularly excited about this year's Consecration Weekend because, next week, our message will be brought by some special guests.

During worship on Saturday evening, we'll hear from about half a dozen McCabe folks – youth and adults – who have gone on mission trips. We'll hear about how God called them to share the love of Jesus Christ with people in other places...

We'll hear how those mission trips expanded their perspectives... and we'll hear how those mission trips inspired them to greater paths of devotion and service here at home. I can't urge you strongly enough to join us at next Saturday's 5:00 service to hear from these folks about their mission trip experiences!

Then, Sunday morning, our message during all three services will be offered by Pastor Mike Flowers. Along with his wife, Libby, Pastor Mike leads the Spirit Lake Ministry Center.

Those of you who have had the privilege of hearing Pastor Mike preach know he is a gifted storyteller who is passionate about sharing the love of Jesus with the people of the Spirit Lake Nation.

Last year, Pastor Mike preached at McCabe in early November and, after that, our Shoebox Christmas gifts started rolling in in higher numbers than we've ever seen before! Those gifts go to children on the Spirit Lake reservation and it is beautiful to hear from Pastor Mike about the powerful impact they have.

Speaking of which, dearest people of McCabe, I expect nothing less after *next* weekend! If you haven't yet been inspired to purchase items for Shoebox Christmas – this month's One Thing project – you will most certainly be inspired to do so after next weekend!

Friends, our God is the Great Giver: the Creator of the world, the one who gives us life, the one who sent Jesus Christ – God's very Son – to live, to die, and to rise *for us and for our salvation*.

Everything we do in this life is in response to God's gifts to us. We can respond with apathy or we can respond in love and gratitude.

So, the central question we must ask ourselves this day – not only as we prepare for Consecration Weekend next week, but also as we prepare for another day as a follower of Jesus Christ – the central question is that question from the very beginning of this message:

Are we going to give only a little bit of ourselves...or are we all in?

Let us pray:

Almighty God, send your Holy Spirit to breakthrough into our hearts and into McCabe United Methodist Church. Lead us to bold, new ways of sharing your love with one another, in our neighborhood, in Bismarck-Mandan, and beyond. May we look to you always as we build your heavenly kingdom on earth. We pray this in the powerful name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

I now invite our ushers to come forward for our time of offering. During this time, may we offer our hearts and our gifts to God in thanksgiving for life's abundant blessings.