

1 Sermon, October 7, 2012

Texts: Matthew 6:19-21, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Title: Think Greater: Give Wholeheartedly

1. Giving is a way of life
2. What allows us to give?
3. Earn all you can
4. Save all you can
5. Give all you can

1. Giving is a way of life

I just got a call from one of Marianne's former parishioners who had gone to a funeral led by a pastor of another denomination, who had talked a little bit about the deceased. According to the man who called, he talked a lot more about the needs of the church, and how people should give.

This isn't that kind of sermon.

I *do* want people to give to the church, not because of the church's needs, but because the church is doing good work that no one else can do.

I want people to give because we're thinking greater. Because we're living out our faith and we are excited about what God is doing among us.

But even more than that, I want people to give as part of abundant, generous lives, and giving to the church is just a part of living an abundant, generous life. In other words, I want people to have generous hearts.

When people have generous hearts, they are thinking about possibilities, not problems. They are thinking greater. They are asking the question, "What can God do among us if we just listen to God's voice?"

People with generous hearts *give* a listening ear to those who need someone to listen.

They *give* a hand to help someone do something.

They *give* others the benefit of the doubt.

They *give* respect.

They *give* a darn about the ones whom Jesus hung out with, the outcasts, the weak, and sinners.

That's what it means to have a generous heart.

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2. What allows us to give?

In our United Methodist heritage, our founding saint, John Wesley, wrote a sermon about generosity called "The Use of Money." It was really about how you could use money for the good of others, "thinking greater" about what might happen if you gave, what it could accomplish in the way of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving the traveler and the stranger a place to lay his head. Wesley wanted Christians to "think greater" about how we could be like a father to the fatherless, a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, and of ease to those who are in pain.

John Wesley had three basic rules about money: Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.

3. Earn all you can

Earn all you can, said John Wesley. John Wesley would encourage us to be industrious. Raise vegetables and sell them. Refinish furniture and sell it. Use whatever you have, including your time, and make money honestly. It's hard to do in this economy, but Wesley encouraged Methodists to find a way.

So, Wesley would have said "earn all you can" to pro baseball players – who many of us think earn too much.

According to USA Today, the median salary for the top 25 pro baseball players on each team is about a million a year. That means that for each team, there are about 12 players who make more than a million dollars, and the rest make less.

John Wesley would say, "Great, now save that salary and give it away. You can live on 5% of that – or less."

Don't feel guilty about making money – unless you're making it unethically, in a way that would do harm to a person's body or soul, or to human society or the earth.

There's a whole bunch of unethical ways to make money today that John Wesley never would have dreamed of. He condemned smuggling, but would not have conceived of how corporations and people can hide money overseas, or how payday loan stores operate, or how easily money was lost in the financial crash of 2008.

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4. Save all you can

Then, earning all we can, Wesley would encourage us to save all we can.

Did you catch the news story this past week about Walter Samasko Jr., 69, who died in May due to heart problems but was not discovered until June when neighbors complained of a bad smell coming from his house?

Samasko lived in Carson City, Nev., a city about 30 miles south of Reno. When authorities went to clean out his home, they found boxes of gold coins in his home and garage. Some coins were in boxes marked "books." Some were wrapped in aluminum foil and stored in ammunition boxes.

There was so much gold that authorities used a wheelbarrow to carry the fortune and estimated the worth of the coins at \$7 million. But even with all this wealth, Samasko had no will. He had no plans for this money. He had only \$200 in the bank at the time of his death, [according to the Las Vegas Sun](#), but had stock accounts totaling in \$165,000 and had been living off of his investments.

Samasko lived in a small, 1970's three-bedroom house of about 1,200 square feet with orange shag carpeting. "There were no antiques, no crystal or family jewelry or anything like that," Grover said. "You would never have suspected the guy would have that much...he certainly didn't live that way."

How is this possible?

Say you earn \$100 per day, about \$12/hour. In a month, you earn about \$2,200. Assume you spend very little extra, and live on \$800 per month, and another \$400 goes to taxes. You then have left a possible savings of \$1,000 per month. If you saved that, after 45 years at 6.5% interest you'd have \$3,450,354.39. Walter Samasko, Jr. had to have really saved to get \$7 million worth in gold coins, even with the price of gold being so high now.

John Wesley would have shaken his head. What good did the money do? Money is to be used, not hoarded. Money can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, encourage people with the gospel, and build community.

Walter Samasko junior didn't seem to have a very abundant life. We was somehow not able to be generous, with his money or time or attention. He died a recluse, keeping everything to himself.

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5. Give all you can

John Wesley would say that the only antidote to such hoarding is giving.

Give all you can, said John Wesley:

First, provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, clothing to put on, whatever nature moderately requires for preserving the body in health and strength. Secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If when this is done there is more, then "do good to them that are of the household of faith." If there be is more still, "as you have opportunity, do good unto all people."

Now, if you think I'm going too far, I want to tell you that, just as earning and saving can lead to hoarding, giving without either earning or saving can lead to impoverishment.

Generosity does not require us to give away that heirloom of grandma's. Generosity does not require us to be in want of food or clothing.

I know a woman who was quite literally giving away her food and kitchen equipment so she had nothing to eat. It was the result of mental illness, and she had to be institutionalized, but you can see how giving without first having earned and saved can be the very opposite of generosity and abundance.

But when we have the resources, giving is a very satisfying thing. What we give can make a difference in people's lives.

John Wesley was convinced of this. Wesley, from lower-middle class stock himself, associated mostly with people who worked hard, owned little, and could never be certain of their financial future. But he preached so widely and became so well known that his income eventually reached 1,400 pounds per year—equivalent to more than \$160,000 today. Still, he chose to live simply but comfortably on just 30 pounds while giving the rest away. In fact, he donated nearly all of the 30,000 pounds he earned in his lifetime. He once wrote, "If I leave behind me ten pounds...you and all mankind can bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber."