

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
Sunday, September 28, 2025 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION: “Let Christians care for nothing that they cannot take away with them. We ought rather to seek after that which will lead us to heaven, namely wisdom, charity, justice, virtue, an ever watchful mind, care of the poor, firm faith in Christ, a mind that can control anger, and hospitality. Striving after these things, we shall prepare for ourselves a dwelling in the land of the peaceful.”

– From the *Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Eternal God, whose will for humankind is that we live within your rule of love, speak to us now through your Word, that we might be called out of preoccupation with the things of this world, and that we might grow toward your eternal realm. May we hear and heed your life-changing warnings, and promises. Bless our hearing, and our doing; for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 16:19-31

As we continue in Year C of our cycle of readings, our Gospel reading again comes from Luke's Gospel. Jesus continues on his way to Jerusalem; preaching and teaching along the way. This morning's reading consists of one of Jesus' parables. Jesus is speaking...

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen,
and who feasted sumptuously every day.
And – at his gate – lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,
who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table;
even the dogs would come and lick his sores.
The poor man died, and was carried away by the angels, to be with Abraham.
The rich man also died and was buried.
In Hades, where he was being tormented,
he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away – with Lazarus by his side.
He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me,
and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue,
for I am in agony in these flames.'
But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that – during your lifetime –
you received your good things, and Lazarus – in like manner evil things,
but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.
Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed,
so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so,
and no one can cross from there to us.'

He said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house –
for I have five brothers – that he may warn them,
so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'
Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'
He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them,
they will repent.'
He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets,
neither will they be convinced – even if someone rises from the dead.'"

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

I Timothy 6:6-19

Our second reading comes from Paul's first letter to Timothy. Paul writes to express his firm commitment to Timothy – his young colleague – who is assigned the difficult task of organizing congregations in Ephesus. Our reading consists of Paul's final exhortations, in this – his First Letter – to Timothy...

Of course, there is great gain in godliness – combined with contentment,
for we brought nothing into the world,
so that we can take nothing out of it,
but – if we have food and clothing – we will be content with these.
But those who want to be rich fall into temptation,
and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires –
that plunge people into ruin and destruction.
For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,
and – in their eagerness to be rich –
some have wandered away from the faith,
and pierced themselves with many pains.
But as for you, man of God, shun all this;
pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.
Fight the good fight of the faith;
take hold of the eternal life to which you were called –
and for which you made the good confession,
in the presence of many witnesses.
In the presence of God – who gives life to all things,
and of Christ Jesus who – in his testimony before Pontius Pilate –
made the good confession,
I charge you to keep the commandment – without spot or blame –
until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which he will bring about at the right time –
he who is the blessed and only Sovereign,
the King of kings and Lord of lords.
It is he alone who has immortality – and dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has ever seen or can see;
to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

As for those who – in the present age – are rich,
command them not to be haughty,
or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches,
but – rather – on God,
who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.
They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
thus storing up for themselves the treasure
of a good foundation for the future,
so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

SERMON

“Generosity Is Good.....for You!”

A Colorado pastor tells of being in a grocery store one day
and encountering a woman she hadn't seen in a long time.

“It was awkward for both of us,” the pastor said.
*“She had suddenly stopped attending church,
and we never learned the reason why.”*

After the two exchanged pleasantries, the pastor said,
*“We miss you.
Is there anything that our church can do for you?”*

The woman replied,
*“Yes, there is.
You could stop asking for money all the time.”*

The pastor didn't indicate how she answered that woman.

Perhaps the woman's response *caught her by surprise,*
and the pastor *didn't have time* to organize a reply.

But she continued to think about it, and – eventually –
she *presented her response* in the form of a sermon to her congregation.

**She started by acknowledging
that the church is always asking for money.**

But *she went on* – quite unapologetically – to *defend that practice*
by enumerating *all the ministries and missions*
that churches engage in.

**The pastor acknowledged that some people
grow weary of being asked to give.**

So – she said – perhaps they would prefer the sort of church
she'd read about recently–
where the members *are not asked* for money.

Instead, they *take turns doing everything* in the church,
including cleaning the building,
providing the music,
preparing the bulletin,
doing the preaching and teaching,
and spending a year *each* on the mission field –
because they have no money to give to missions.

And – in the winter – they *dress very warmly* for worship
because they *don't run the furnace.*

They offer no child care, no children's church, and no youth ministry.

The pastor concluded that example by saying,
*"A church that needs no money
wouldn't be much of a church at all.*

I'm glad to be part of a church that always needs money.

*It means we're doing something,
going somewhere,
making a difference."*

The pastor made some additional worthy points in her sermon.

She then concluded by saying,
"It's a good thing the church is asking for money.

*What kind of church would the church be
if it wasn't always reaching out to help others in need?*

*And the local church is unarguably
the best place to open our pocketbooks."*

It was a good sermon – and a good response to the complaint
that the church is always asking for money.

We should recognize, however, that it is not the whole response.

The argument that the church should be asking for money
because of *all the good stuff it does* has merit –
but *any worthy charity* can make that case.

The church *isn't* simply a charity with a *religious sheen* on it.

Christians are not simply do-gooders who also pray.

In fact, doing good for others –
often expressed biblically as “*love your neighbor as yourself*” –
is the *second* of the *two great summary commandments*
that Jesus spoke.

The *first* of them is

“*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.*”

(Matthew 22:37)

So – for **Christians** – giving out of what we have
has as much to do with the *first great commandment*
as with the *second one*.

To say it another way,
we should give *not only to do good for others,*
but also because it's *necessary for our own spiritual well-being.*

It's an *essential aspect* of the way we love **God**
with all our *heart, soul and mind*.

The apostle Paul gets at this truth in his first letter to Timothy,
when he addresses the negative impact money can have on our souls.

In our reading,

Paul speaks of the gain that comes to us

“in godliness combined with contentment”

and goes on to mention the basics – food and clothing –
as sufficient.

But – then – he warns about the dangers –

dangers that the desire to be rich can bring:

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,

and in their eagerness to be rich

some have wandered away from the faith

and pierced themselves with many pains.” (1 Timothy 6:10)

Paul next addresses Timothy specifically,

calling him ***“man of God”*** –

which is an *ancient title* for a prophet.

Paul tells him to ***“shun all this.”***

In other words, some *threats to our spiritual health* –

including the *love of money* –

are so *subtle* and so *powerful*

that the *best way* to deal with them

is to *stay away* from them.

Obviously, we live in a world that runs on money.

As my 9th Grade Economics teacher said – :

“Money is a matter of functioning four:

a medium, a measure, a standard, a store.”

We cannot have a *decent existence* without money –

and Paul is well aware of *that*.

But he also recognizes that the lure of money –

and the acquisition of possessions it makes possible –

are so *dangerous* to our souls

that we *have to defang* them.

And, *one of the best ways* to do that
is by *opening our hands* and *giving some of it away*.

So it is that – farther on, in the same chapter –
Paul addresses Christians “*who in the present age are rich.*”

He tells them *not to allow* their wealth to make them “*haughty,*
or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches.”

Rather – Paul says – they should *set their hope on God*
“*who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*”

And – lest they miss the point – he spells it out:
“*They are to do good,*
to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
thus storing up for themselves the treasure
of a good foundation for the future,
so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

Notice he **doesn't** say they should be generous and ready to share
because that's *good for others*,
though – no doubt – Paul would agree with that.

Rather, he says they should be
“*rich in good works, generous, and ready to share*”
because – by so doing –
they “*take hold of the life that really is life.*”

They should be generous
because it's one of the *things that makes them* – the *givers* –
spiritually healthy.

Back in **2001**, the popular author – **Stephen King** –
gave the *commencement address* at **Vassar College**.

Though **King** is known for *horror fiction*,
many readers have noticed explicitly **Christian themes** in *his novels* –
and he has even *acknowledged that* in interviews.

In any case – in the **Vassar speech** –
he made some statements that mirror something
Paul said in this letter to **Timothy**:
“*[F]or we brought nothing into the world,
so that we can take nothing out of it.*”

While walking down the road – one day in 1999,
King was *struck* – and *severely injured* – by a minivan.

And – in the speech –
he referred to *both his accident*
and to the *earning potential* of the graduates.

He said:
“Well, I’ll tell you one thing *you’re not going to do*,
and that’s *take it with you*.

I’m worth – I don’t exactly know how many – millions of dollars ...
and – a couple of years ago –
I found out what ‘*you can’t take it with you*’ means.

I found out while I was *lying in the ditch*
at the side of a *country road*,
covered with mud and blood,
and with the *tibia of my right leg*
poking out the side of my jeans

I had a **MasterCard** in my wallet,
but when you’re *lying in the ditch* – with broken glass in your hair –
no one accepts MasterCard....

We all know that life is ephemeral,
but – on that particular day –
and in the months that followed,
I got a *painful* – but *extremely valuable* –
look at life’s *simple backstage truths*:

We come in naked – and broke.

We may be dressed *when we go out*, but we’re just as broke. ...

And *how long* in between? ... Just the *blink of an eye*.

**King went on to discuss what the graduates could do with their earnings –
in the time they had in that eye-blink:**

“...for a *short period* ... you and your contemporaries
will wield *enormous power*:
the power of the *economy*,
the power of the *hugest military-industrial complex*
in the history of the world,
the power of the **American society**
you will create in your own image.

That’s *your time, your moment*. *Don’t miss it*.

But then he added:

“Of *all the power* which will shortly come into your hands ...
the *greatest* is undoubtedly the *power of compassion*,
the *ability to give*.

We have *enormous resources* in this country –
resources *you yourselves* will soon command –
but they are only *yours on loan*....

I came here to *talk about charity*,
and I want you to *think about it on a large scale*.

Should you *give away* what you have?
Of course you should.

I want you to consider making your lives *one long gift* to others,
and *why not?* ...

All you want to get – at the *getting place*.... *none of that* is real.

All that lasts is *what you pass on*.
The rest is *smoke and mirrors*.

Finally, **King** mentioned a *specific local charity* called **Dutchess Outreach**,
which helps the *hungry, the sick, and the homeless*.

He said he was making a **\$20,000 contribution** to it
and *challenged audience members* to do the same.

And here's *one more thing* he said:

“Giving *isn't* about the receiver or the gift but the *giver*.

It's *for* the giver.

One *doesn't* open one's *wallet* to improve the world,
although *it's nice* when that happens;
one does it to *improve one's self*.

I give because it's the *only concrete way* I have
of saying that I'm *glad to be alive*
and that I can *earn my daily bread* doing what I love....

Giving is a way of *taking the focus off the money* we make
and putting it *back where it belongs* –
on the *lives* we lead,
the *families* we raise,
the *communities* which nurture us.

Good sermon, Stephen!

Devotional writer **Evelyn Underhill**
would *likely have agreed* with **King**.

She once said that the *saints she knew* personally
were *so generous* that they were often unable
to *keep anything* for themselves.

Some Christians have taken this to the point of vows of poverty.

The **Little Sisters of the Poor** – whose local home I visit, about twice a month –
to lead a Worship Service – take such vows.

And, they take a *fourth* vow: ***Hospitality!***

Such vows *clearly aren't possible* for most of us,
but *that increases* our spiritual need
not to hold onto wealth too tightly.

**In Christianity, we often refer to certain practices
as important for our growth in the Spirit.**

They include prayer,
Bible study,
confession of sins,
worship,
service, and several others.

We sometimes refer to them as “*spiritual disciplines.*”

Such disciplines *help us avoid superficiality* in our faith,
which **Richard J. Foster** –
who has *written a book* on the disciplines –
calls “*the curse of our age.*”

Foster adds that
“*the doctrine of instant satisfaction – instant gratification –
is a primary spiritual problem.*”

He explains that the spiritual disciplines
“*call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.
They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm.*”

Generosity is also a spiritual discipline –
which means it’s a *practice*
that *helps us avoid superficiality* in our faith.

In fact, someone has said that –
when we *present the offering plates* at the altar,
after the collection has been received –
the *gist of our offertory prayer* should be this:

“*No matter what else we say or do here this morning, O Lord,
this tells you what we really think of you.”*

So – yes – the church is always asking for money.

But it's *also always asking* you to pray,
to read the Bible,
to confess your sins,
to do good deeds,
and to attend worship.

All those things are *good for our souls* – and *help us go deeper* into our faith.

Yet another blessing of attending church

is that it *provides us* with an opportunity to *give generously* –
and that, both for our ministry together, and, for our own good.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: *Amen.*

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

(Adapted from the Second Helvetic Confession)

Now the works we do by faith are pleasing to God and are approved by God. Because of faith in Christ, those who do good works do them by God's grace through the Holy Spirit. For St. Peter said, "In every nation any one who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God." And Paul said, "We have not ceased to pray for you...that you may walk worthily of the Lord, fully pleasing him, bearing fruit in every good work." We teach that God rewards our good deeds, yet at the same time we teach that God does not crown in us our merits but his gifts. Accordingly we say that whatever reward we receive is also grace, and is more grace than reward, because the good we do, we do more through God than through ourselves. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

CHARGE AND BLESSING

We are created in the image of a very generous God –
a God who made this fair earth to be our home.

And – when human disobedience brought sin and death into the world –
this generous God gave the greatest gift,
salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now, we also have the opportunity to be generous,
not only for the benefit of others,
but because it is good for us, as well.

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....