

November 1 and 2, 2008, Sun Prairie UMC

“Faithful Living, Generous Giving: What are you worth?”  
Sermon by dave werner

*[Note to Gentle Reader: Since I preach from notes and not a full text, what you see here is more of a summary than a sermon text. Bad news: you miss all the inspired impromptu remarks. Good news: it's a quicker “read” than “listen” I imagine. Shalom! dave]*

today's FUNNY=====

A young couple moves into a new neighborhood.

The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside.

"That laundry is not very clean," she said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments.

About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?"

The husband said, **"I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."**

[forwarded by Squeaky]

Yeah, you can send this Funny to anybody you want. And, if you're REAL nice, you'll tell them where you got it! [www.mikeysFunnies.com](http://www.mikeysFunnies.com)

**One issue in stewardship is perspective.**

- Is our vision clouded?
- Are we looking at what we don't have—or think we don't have, or at the abundance of God's gifts?
- What God has done for us, or what we want?
- What does God want from us?

Two weeks ago I offered praise and thanksgiving for the ministry of this congregation and a challenge to continue supporting this ministry in 2009.

Last week Pastor Susan said:

*Here's the reality: pledge campaigns are not about money, dollars and budgets but about mission, spiritual growth, and relationship to God.*

Today, I ask that we look a bit at what God has done for us.

The Beatitudes of Matthew are sometimes called the “Be-Attitudes” because they offer us some possibilities for being, and that being brings an abundant life. We find in these verses a way to be happy in daily life.

What are we worth? Any of us? **All of us! We are worth being loved by God!** Amazing grace!

Salvation or wholeness—

- From sin and death (brokenness)
- For daily living! (wholeness)
- Living in the now and the then within the energy of God's great love! Tender and powerful; empowering and forgiving!

God is fully willing and able to help us....

A man is walking along the street enjoying his day, not paying attention to where he is going, and falls into a hole. The hole is so deep and the sides so steep he can find no way to get out, so he yells for help.

A stranger walks by, looks into the hole, decides he doesn't know this person in distress, and keeps on walking by. Next a doctor walks by and hears the man hollering for help. He looks into the hole and tosses down a prescription to the man in distress and continues on his way. The next person to come walking by the hole is a priest. The

priest hears the man hollering for help, sees the man in the hole, stops to offer him a prayer, and then keeps on walking past.

Finally, a friend hears the hollering man in the hole, stops at the top of the hole and then jumps in to join him. The man in the hole screams, "Are you crazy? Now we are both down here." And the friend says, **"Yes, I know. I've been here before and I can show you the way out."**

--variously attributed to "West Wing" and elsewhere I have taken it from *YOU HAVE A "HOLE" LOT OF OPTIONS* By Russell J. White

God knows! Heartache and rejection, ignorance, rebellion, death of a child, all these and more . . . . and God—the friend we have in God through Jesus—can help us out of the pits we put ourselves into in everyday life.

Mission of the church:

**"The Mission of Sun Prairie United Methodist Church is to invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ, through worship, through spiritual growth, through fellowship, through service to others."**

Last week Pastor Susan said:

*Here's the reality: pledge campaigns are not about money, dollars and budgets but about mission, spiritual growth, and relationship to God.*

That step-up chart many of you have received is a measure, in part, of spiritual growth and vitality.

- Not the number of dollars,
- But the percentage of our income/wealth.

A tale of two congregations no longer meeting:

- One received a gift of money, fairly sizable for that time, and banked it, drawing from it as needed until all the money and all the people and all the energy were gone.
- One dwindled in people power—human resources—to a handful of mostly elderly people. They could no longer be

“church” but it wasn’t because of money! When the church closed after 114 years, the final decisions were how to distribute \$400,000 - \$600,000 from assets from an estate and sale of property.

SPUMC has people and programs and energy and staff and volunteers and all sorts of resources! Just a bit short on dollars right now.

Stewardship (managing) question is NOT how many dollars do I/we need to give to do our fair share? The question is this: am I/are we giving a reasonable percentage of our wealth back to God for God to use? The tithe is 10% but nationally, we give at or below the 3% level. **CAN YOU TAKE A STEP UP?**

Last week Pastor Susan said:

*Here’s the reality: pledge campaigns are not about money, dollars and budgets but about mission, spiritual growth, and relationship to God.*

The budget will be shaped in part by how we respond to “Faithful Living, Generous Giving.” Your response will be shaped in large part by your relationship with God. We worship a God of blessing and abundant love!

Story of “One of My Own” on p. 107f

- Two baptisms in one service: one the grandchild of a longtime member; the other within a new family to the congregation.
- After worship, pictures. Longtime member offers to hold new family’s baby. He tells others, “No, this one isn’t mine; I’m just holding him for a moment.”
- Monday morning: longtime member Grandpa calls the pastor, asking to speak with her about something urgent. She wonders what went wrong at the baptism!
- Later that day, the grandfather explains that he wants to know how to change his will to include the congregation with a child’s portion of his estate. Why?

- “Yesterday I realized something while I was holding that other baby, the one from the family that just joined the church. I kept telling people that wasn’t my child, but then it dawned on me that it was part of my family, part of my church family, and that I have a responsibility for that little boy just like I have for my own grand-daughter. I’ve been a member of this church for 40 years, and in God’s eyes I’m a grandfather to more than just my own....”

From (Bishop) Robert Schnase’s FIVE PRACTICES OF FRUITFUL CONGREGATIONS  
(Abingdon, 2007)

God cares for us in so many ways, and we are grateful, I’m sure.

Here in this congregation, we find

Family and fellowship,

Ministry and meaning,

Learning opportunities and lively moments,

Singing and service,

Worship and infinite worth!

May God work with us as we walk the Way of Jesus in this time and in this place!