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The Pilgrim



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From
The Pastor

Stewardship Questions

What does our faith have to say about the current financial crisis? Everyone now rails against the “greed and corruption on Wall Street,” but until the market crashed, few spoke of the market in moral terms. Churches and church members alike invested in the market without questioning the morality of their actions. The market was perceived by almost everyone as a morally-neutral force at work in the world with an almost God-like capacity to “send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Only now are most people coming to grapple with the truth that the market was never neutral. It always served certain interests above others.

One of my favorite Biblical stories is from the 22nd chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, when the Pharisees, in an effort to entrap Jesus, ask him whether or not it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. Jesus answers, famously, in the language of the King James, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” The way I understood this passage growing up was, in response to the Pharisee’s question, “Shall we pay taxes or not?” Jesus’ answer was “yes.” In other words, go to church on Sunday, pay your taxes on Monday, and everything will be fine.

Yet for a Jew in the first century, the answer to the question, “What belongs to God?” would have been “Everything.” Jesus wasn’t answering the Pharisees’ question so much as saying, “Wrong question.” The more profound question which Jesus put to them has no easy answers: If everything in my life belongs to God what, if anything, belongs to Caesar?

Whenever I hold a new members class at our church, I always ask the question, who or what are the Caesars in our lives? That is, what in my life demands my ultimate allegiance, my trust, my loyalty? These were the sort of questions the early Christians wrestled with: Can I be a Christian and hold certain jobs? Should I eat food sacrificed to idols? Should I serve in the Roman military? Should I, in fact, pay my taxes, particularly if those taxes are used to support Rome’s military expansion?

At least a part of our current financial crisis is that we gave to the market too much of the trust, allegiance and loyalty that belongs to God alone.

These are the issues at the heart of the Stewardship season. How do we affirm that we belong to God in a culture that is constantly compelling us to give our allegiance to other gods? The most important Stewardship question is not, how much should I give to the church to support its mission

and ministry, (as important as that question is), but—in light of my discipleship— how do I earn my money, how do I invest my money, how do I spend my money? It is only in that context that asking, how much of my money should I give away, makes any sense at all.

These questions are at once intensely personal and profoundly corporate. To put it another way: In a culture that is constantly compelling us to give our allegiance to other gods, how does the church affirm that it belongs to God?

Peace,

Jeff

**STEWARDSHIP
SUNDAY IS
NOVEMBER
16th, 2008**

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Spiritual Formation in November

Forgive us our Debts— America on the Precipice

November 2, 9, 16 and 23

Led by Jerry McPike

9:30 a.m. Downstairs in the Bird Room

The United States faces an array of economic and environmental challenges that are unprecedented:

- We grow ever more dependent on foreign oil at a time when the peak of world oil production may occur within a decade
- Our trade deficit is triple the size it was only a few years ago
- Our debts at the individual, governmental and national levels are at third world levels
- We have a higher level of inequality than at any time since the 1920s and inequality continues to grow
- Three million U.S. manufacturing jobs were lost in this decade alone
- Without reform, the budgets for Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security will, in less than three decades, exceed—as a percentage of (GNP) gross national product--that of the whole federal budget of today
- Payments for oil and interest on our debt flows out to foreign countries at increasingly high levels
- We are dangerously dependent on foreigners to finance our debts
- Our country does little of consequence as global warming mounts

And yet, politicians at the highest levels refuse to tell the American public the truth about our situation. They seem to have a group understanding of what happens to messengers of ill tidings. And so, we paper over the after-effects of each broken economic bubble with more debts and ever lower interest rates—setting us up for the next bubble.

In an adult education class beginning on November 2, we will outline the economic and environmental challenges facing us, the ways in which we live beyond our means, and how we might come to live within our means. And also how we might do this while reducing inequality and addressing the environmental situation.

We will also discuss a foreign policy that might complement our economic and environmental policies.

A schedule of classes is as follows:

- November 2 Peak Oil
- November 9 Living Beyond Our Means
- November 16 Living Within Our Means
- November 23 Limits to Power ††

Pilgrim Parents and Spiritual Formation

November 9 and 16

9:30 a.m. in the Upstairs Education Room

For two Sundays in November, Pilgrim Parents are invited to come and explore the connections between human development of young children and spiritual development. When do children have an understanding of God? What can they comprehend at certain ages about faith and formation? How do children grow spiritually? What nurtures their spirit at different points in their young lives? On November 9th we will explore these connections. On November 16th we will look at how to create a home for Advent. How do we make our home a place where faith grows during this incredibly hectic, commercialized time of the year? ††

Tents of Hope

November 2nd

9:30 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall

An advocacy endeavor created by the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ, Tents of Hope is a journey of hope and compassion, inviting communities to design and paint simulated refugee tents to create awareness and support for the people of Darfur, Sudan. It's the hope that these tents will serve as doorways to concrete action. Pilgrims has purchased a tent and on November 2nd, we will have an intergenerational formation class to learn the current issues in Darfur and paint our advocacy tent. ††

Weekday Bible Study

Theology on Tap

Mondays, October 27 to November 17

A new round of Theology on Tap begins Monday nights across the street at the Brickskeller: **October 27 to November 17**. The series focus will be "Biblical Dreams." As always, it's Bible study even for those who have never done Bible study before. Planned with young adults in mind, all ages are welcome. We will gather for dinner in the downstairs back room at 6:30, with Bible study at 7:30. You do not have to attend all five weeks, but can come the weeks you are available. *Send a note to Jeff Krehbiel, if you'd like more details* (jeff.krehbiel@verizon.net) ††

Kelly Jenkins Reports on Charity Bicycle Ride

Pilgrims Kelly Jenkins and Jeff Fox entered the 2008 "Braking the Cycle" charity bicycle ride from Gettysburg to New York City. The 3-day ride raised \$144,000 to benefit The Center, a program for persons with HIV/AIDS. Jeff fell on the first day of the ride (it rained all day), injured his shoulder, and had to withdraw. Kelly finished the ride and sent a report to people who contributed to the Center on his behalf. Here are two excerpts:



"A couple hours into my first day (the rain had temporarily stopped), I came over a hill and was stunned by fields of blooming sunflowers on both sides of the road. Acres and

acres of tall yellow and brown familiar faces were staring at me as I rode by. I immediately thought of my mother! For those of you who don't know, my mom passed away from pancreatic cancer two days before last Christmas. The beautiful countryside, the fields of sunflowers, the physical challenge, the charity and the emotions of the ride....all signs of a beautiful, stately and loving presence which has now left a gaping void in my life. My mom and the essence of this ride had uncanny parallels. I realized then, that I was riding this year for her...not for me or anyone else! For everything she stood for in her life, the way she lived her life and the way she tried to teach me to live mine.

"Another amazing thing happened on [the second] day.... As a Gay man, I sometimes can't help but feel like "the outsider" or isolated from mainstream America. I'm very comfortable being who I am, but I think being in any kind of minority, you can't help but have these feelings from time to time. So I was blown away when riding through Frenchtown, Delaware, that we were greeted by two little boys with their mothers handing out bananas, chocolate and words of encouragement to all the riders. And again in Nutley, New Jersey, a group of older women (grandmothers, probably) had decorated their yard with poster board signs of support, encouragement, and thanks, giving us cold bottles of water and handmade red, beaded AIDS pins. It really gave everyone a renewed energy, purpose and touched our hearts." ††

Reflections on Pilgrimage Service Day

From Nancy Daugherty

Pilgrimage Service Day, on Saturday, October 4th, brought many surprises and unexpected gifts. First of all, the 25 participants in this year's Service Day were an incredibly multi-generational group that included Pilgrims in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, & 80s – a surprising cross-section of our congregation. The second surprise was that we would all be going to the same project site, since there had been a last minute cancellation by one of the service organizations. The third surprise was the weather – it was a gorgeous fall day and a real treat to be outside.

Our group went to a home in Northeast to do yard work for an elderly woman who had not been out of her home much in the last 15 years since her husband died. She had a lovely, but neglected looking, home and garden. Our task was to pull weeds, prune shrubs, and mow the grass – work she was not able to tend to on her own.

The social worker who took us to the house knocked on the door, but she wasn't optimistic that the woman would come out, as she usually didn't.

So we fanned out over the large yard and began our work. It soon became apparent that this had once been a very well-tended garden with carefully selected plants and thoughtfully-placed stepping stones. Several hours and 43 large trash bags full of leaves, vines, branches and grass clippings later, it was time to make our way back to Pilgrims. Though we never saw the woman of the house, part of the group reported later that the woman's daughter came out and thanked them for the work we had done. It was an odd experience to spend so much time working at this woman's home and never see her, but I felt like we were able to experience a part of her life in the garden.

We lived in God's way that day by connecting to the beauty of God's creation. We lived in God's Way that day by giving the gift of our labor to a stranger. And we lived in God's Way that day by sharing this experience with each other. ††

From Calva Leonard

This was the fourth time I've participated in Service Day, and each time has been a valuable experience for me. From the gathering outside the Pilgrimage for a song, a prayer, and a scripture reading to set the tone for our day, through working together in service with other Pilgrims, and ending with lunch with speakers from the National Coalition for the Homeless, the day speaks to me about what I think Pilgrims is all about. Working together with other Pilgrims, some of whom I know well, others less well, creates in me a sense of community with my fellow Pilgrims that I carry with me throughout the year.

In past years I've worked at the food bank or at DC Central Kitchen. In those places one knows that the labor will serve many people. This year, twenty-two of us cleaned a yard of 43 very large bags of overgrown weeds and vines. We were helping one 85-year old widow to "age in place." My mother is 85 and lives alone. We didn't meet the woman whose yard we cleaned, but I related to her and thought about all the people who help my mother in Louisiana.

Gathering for lunch back in the Bird Room, we were joined by a staff member of the National Coalition for the Homeless and by three people who have lived on the streets of D.C. and serve on the NCH Speakers' Bureau. Each year I am struck by these presentations and think how they must impact many of our Pilgrimage groups who have had little exposure to issues related to poverty and the homeless. I am grateful that I can participate on this one day and very grateful for the Pilgrimage and what it does throughout the year. ††

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We have over 1,000 people stay with us at The Pilgrimage every year. They come to explore the connections between faith and action; they learn about hunger, homelessness and poverty through service, storytelling, and reflection. Service Day is an opportunity for members of the church to experience this journey and connect with one of the primary outreach ministries of the Church of the Pilgrims. But for me, it was an experience that displayed a church community of immense humility, sustained purpose, and incredible strength.

We opened the day by receiving a word for us to reflect on throughout the day. My word, grace, was powerfully displayed by every person who joined us: in the way weeds were lovingly pulled, the grass powerfully mowed, the sidewalk carefully swept, the National Coalition for the Homeless speakers intently listened to,

FROM THE PILGRIMAGE: GRACE ON SERVICE DAY

*Matt Boote,
Pilgrimage Program Manager*

the way one person would hold open a garbage bag willingly as another shoveled prickly holly brush inside, the glowing smiles on everyone's faces, the sweat that dripped steadily down brows, but most importantly, by the simple action of showing up in the first place. Service Day and our trips are about more than one's time at The Pilgrimage. They are a tool that enables people to see purpose in their actions, intent in their interactions. I witnessed a committed group come together in community to help and, in the process, define what it means to have intent and purpose.

(See page three of this issue for reflections on Service Day by two Pilgrims' participants.) ††