

McCabe United Methodist Church
“Someone Else’s Nickel”
Matthew 25:14-30
October 18, 2009
Pastor Art Scanson

Sometime back I was reading about the old train station in Cincinnati and how it was one of the last of the great railroad terminals. It was built just a few years before passenger train service went out of existence. It was built in the Art Deco Style with its outstanding feature, the great half-dome rising up out of the west. Along with its great arch facing the east. Another of the marvelous features of that the immense arch was that two people could stand at opposite ends of the arch, and talk to each other over that vast space. It is said that you can actually whisper to each other across that distance.

On the outside, that arch can be seen for blocks. There was a circular drive up to the front of the station. If you were just going to be a few minutes, to buy a ticket or to meet an incoming train, you could park on that drive. However, you had to put up with one of the world’s most frustrating parking meters. As they were used to keep cars moving or else pay the price.

Most of us, well at least those of us who have gray hair, have seen or had to use parking meters at one time or another. However, the ones at the train station in Cincinnati were called the world’s most frustrating parking meters because they didn’t have a dial on them. They had no “face” with numbers of hours or minutes on them, no red needle pointing to the remaining time. These meters were utterly blank - nothing but a box with a slot for your coin with an invisible timer inside. So, if you were looking for a parking space and saw someone just pulling out, there was no way of knowing how much time was left on the meter. Thus, no safe way to play it but for you to put a nickel into the meter. As you wouldn’t dare try to park on someone else’s nickel. For those people who would customarily drive around the block looking for a meter with time left on it, these meters were a big, disappointing frustration - you had to pay your own way.

The principle of parking on someone else’s nickel can apply to many areas of life. It might go like this. You are in the check out line at the grocery store and a woman in front of you had just a few items. What would happen if, when she got to the cashier, she said, “I only have a few items; it’s no big deal, so I won’t pay today. Just add a little bit to the bills of these people in line behind me.” This would be a way of trying to park on someone else’s nickel.

This principle happens in almost every church, and McCabe is no exception. I don’t know the exact figures, but I do know that in most churches about one-third of the people who claim membership contribute nothing toward its support. These people still want the church here when it’s time for their daughter to get married. Or to be here when someone in their family dies. They want the church to be here when they’re in the hospital and a visit and a prayer would feel good. Or they want the church here on Christmas Eve so they can attend in all the Christmas beauty.

This is clearly not a practice of good stewardship. And I know that for the most part I am “preaching to the choir” as the saying goes. My friends, we can’t do much

about others. But God does ask us about being faithful with what God calls us to do and be! So, let's look at some other practices that may pass for ways of getting by on someone else's nickel.

It's not good Christian stewardship if, we look at the bottom line of the budget, and then divide that number by the number of members of the church in order to determine a "fair share." Again, the rule of thumb is that 20 percent of the people generally account for 80 percent of the giving to a church. So, if that 20 percent decided to give only their fair share, the church would go broke in about 30 minutes. Thus, giving your "fair share" isn't good stewardship - it is trying to park on someone else's nickel. Rather, as today's scripture lesson and the children's message tells us that those who have much, much will be required. This is the call to those who follow Jesus.

Then there are those who use the "guilt" system to decide how much to give. They decide how little they can give without feeling guilty for not giving more. Leaving the church to have to continually ask for more money over and over. Because we continue to park on someone else's nickel.

The counterpart to the "guilt" system is the "pride" system. These people ask, "How much do I have to give in order to take pride in what I give?" To be in the upper 10 or 20% of the giving units of the church.

Neither the guilt system nor the pride system is stewardship.

So, if none of these is stewardship, then what is? Stewardship is enumerating the ways in which God has blessed you, then asking yourself how you might respond. It isn't enough to just reflect on your blessings in general, rather, it is to systematically make a list of the things God has blessed your life with. Including not just our "needs" (the essentials of that support life) but also the things that are our "wants" (the things that allow us to play and enjoy life). In that listing you will be able to experience a celebration of life! Even in the most difficult of times, when we in this country, will take time to list all of the blessings in our life we will be able to celebrate life.

Again let me say it. Stewardship is enumerating the ways in which God has blessed you, and then asking yourself how you might respond. Honestly asking God, "Lord what do you want me to do?" As God has called us. And when each of us faithfully follow God, if we are listening and responding to God, God will not have McCabe go without but rather prosper and grow!

Begin with the fact that God allowed Jesus the only begotten and dearly beloved Son to die on the cross so you and I might have life in all its fullness. Then move on to home and food, clothing and work, family and friends, and we soon find that virtually all that is good about life is a gift from God. This then, is the place to ask, "What would be an appropriate measure of my response to God's goodness?" That is stewardship! It is called, faithfully caring for all that has been given to us! Anything less is a matter of parking on someone else's nickel.

Let me close with a story. Linda was a single parent, trying to take care of herself and raise five-year-old Steve. She was a single parent because when her husband learned that the necessary surgery for her cancer would leave her disfigured, he left. One evening, Linda tucked Steve into bed and was reading a book to him. He interrupted her to ask if she had bought that book for him.

“Yes,” she said.

He then inquired if she had also bought the bed in which he slept.

Again, the answer was, “Yes.”

Had she bought the house they called home?

Yes, she had.

And what about that new sweater he liked so much?

“Yes,” she said, she had bought that, too.

He thought about how good she had been to him, supplying all his needs, and finally he said, “Mommy, get my piggy bank. There are seven pennies in it. Take them and get something you really want for you.”

As is so often the case, we have much to learn from our children. Steve realized that everything he had was a gift from his mother. His response was to offer her his seven cents, everything he had. Our relationship to God is just like Steve’s relationship to his mother. Everything we have is a gift from God.

In the pew in front of you there are some cards for prayer requests, extra offering envelopes. On those envelopes with some statements:

I have one that was filled out: by the looks fo the handwriting it was probable someone in their early to mid-teens. I will not share the name and other information as someone might know this person and it would not be appropriate to share with out their permission.

-Please have the Pastor contact me.

-I am interested in joining the church.

-I am a visitor

-Other (with a blank) _____

(Then)

Name _____

Address _____

City/St/Zip _____

Phone _____

My Offering \$ My life

Yes, this person has it right. As Christians we start with giving our life and when we do, God will truly shower us with untold blessings!

Lord, what would you have us do?