

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“WHY CHURCH? REASON THREE: MONEY
MATTERS”
1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19
September 26, 2010
9:00 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

The sermon today is the third in a series we are offering on the subject: **“Why Church.”** The focus of our attention today is on why the church is always asking for money. And yes it’s true, the church is always asking for money, and giving it is for our spiritual well-being.

Of course there is an alternative for those people who have grown weary of being asked to give. One pastor said she read about a church where the members aren’t 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). In 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.

You might agree with this pastor who says that a church that needs no money wouldn’t be much of a church at all. Here at this church we always need money. We need money because we are a church that is doing something, going somewhere, making a difference. I pray that all of you agree. What kind of church would we be if we never reached out to help others in need? We are called by God to serve this local community as a reminder of the **“Holy”**. I would venture to say that there is no better place in this community for you to open your pocketbooks and give than right here at Park Hill. Of course there are other worthy causes to give to as well, such as charities. But this church is more than a charity.

As Christians, giving is essential for our spiritual well-being. It's part of the way we love God with all our heart, soul and mind. We are not simply do-gooders here. The bible teaches us to ***“love your neighbor as yourself”***. But it first says, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”*** (Matthew 22:37).

Perhaps some people will always be weary of the call to give. But in the text today, Paul addresses the negative impact money can have on our souls. He 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 that the desire to be rich can bring, stating, ***“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).

Well the truth is, we live in a world that runs on money. 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. To have wealth is not a sin, for all things come from God. As a matter of fact, Paul says to those ***“who in the present age are rich”*** that the rich should set their hope ***“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.”***

Paul makes it clear that we should be generous because it's one of the things that makes us spiritually healthy. He says, be ***“rich in good works, generous, and ready to share”*** and by so doing ***“take hold of the life that really is life.”***

In 2001, Stephen King gave the commencement address at Vassar College. He recalled that while walking down the road one day in 1999, he was struck and severely injured by a minivan. In the speech, he referred to both his accident and to the earning potential of the graduates, saying: 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 brief, 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. (1)

I'll tell you right now! I couldn't preach a better sermon than that.

We are now in our centennial year. We worship in a church without a mortgage because others sacrificed to pay for it. Some people are so generous that they take a vow of poverty. No one here will be asked to do that. But there are certain practices that are important for our growth in the Spirit. They include prayer, Bible study, confession of sins, worship, submission, service and others. We call these **“spiritual disciplines.”** The 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,”** adding **“the doctrine of instant satisfaction 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.”** (2)

Generosity is a spiritual discipline, which means it is one practice that helps us avoid superficiality in our faith. So yes, the church is always asking for money. But it's also always asking you to pray, read the Bible, confess your sins, do good deeds and attend worship. All those things are good for our souls and help us go deeper into our faith.

We are all made in the image and likeness of God and we have the gift of choice. As far as we know, none of the other animals has the gift of choice. They have appetites. They have instincts, but not the gifts of reflective choice. A dog wants what he wants, when he wants it. If he can, he takes it. And that's the end of the matter.

With you and me, it is different. We have a variety of options. We weigh one against the other. We choose one over the other, for whatever reason. It looks better, or it is more accessible, or it is less expensive. Then after that choice has been made, we look back on it, sometimes with regret, sometimes with satisfaction. A dog doesn't have to go through all that process. He just reacts to his instincts without contemplation or reflection. And that is a much simpler way to live. He is not bothered with the burden of choice. But I would not trade with

him even if I could. For all of the agony that choice brings into our lives, it is the source of our dignity. God has entrusted us with the gift of choice. I pray that it is your choice to give abundantly in support of our ministry here.

If you are open to the blessing of attending this church as it provides you with an opportunity to give generously, *for your own good, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.*

1.King, Stephen. Commencement Address, May 20, 2001, <http://commencement.vassar.edu/2001/010520.king.html>.

2.Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline. HarperSanFrancisco, 1978, 1988, 1998, 1.