

“Life as an Investment”

Date: Nov. 13, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Matthew 25:14-30

Theme: Stewardship of time and talent; baptism

Occasion: 22nd Sunday After Pentecost

Today’s Gospel lesson is often used as the text for preaching stewardship sermons, asking people to invest their money in the kingdom of God. And that is not a bad interpretation of this text. But this morning I’d like to address the issue of stewardship from a different angle, and talk about the stewardship of time and talent.

I’d like to begin by telling a story. Imagine that you had won the following prize in a contest. Each morning, your bank account would deposit \$86,400 into your private account for you to use. However, this prize has rules, just as any game has rules.

The rules are: #1. Everything that you didn’t spend during each day would be taken away from you. #2. You may not transfer money into some else’s account. You, and you alone may spend it. Each morning, upon awakening, the bank opens your account with another \$86,400 for that day. Okay. Got it?

Now, the final rule. The bank can end the game, without warning, at any time. Whenever it decides, the bank can say, “It’s over. The game is over.” And the bank can close your account, and you will not receive a new one.

What would you do, personally? I think you would buy anything and everything you wanted, right? Not only for yourself, but for all of the people you love, right? Even for people you don’t know, because you couldn’t possibly spend it all on yourself. You would try to spend every cent, and use it all. Wouldn’t you?

Well, actually this game is reality. Each of us is in possession of just such a

magical bank. We can't see it though. The magical bank is time. Each morning that we wake up, God gives us 86,400 second as a gift of life. And when we go to sleep at night, any time remaining, is not credited to us.

What we haven't lived-up that day, is lost forever. Yesterday is forever gone. Each morning the account is refilled, but the bank can dissolve your account at any time, without warning. So what will you do with your 86,400 seconds today?

Those seconds of life are worth so much more than the same amount in dollars. Think about that, and remember this - "Life is a gift from God. Enjoy every second of your life, because time races by so much quicker than you think. I would also ask you to think about this. Are you living your life the way God wants you to?

Because one day, and none of us knows when, we will all be going home, to our eternal home. Which is to say, we go home to face God. That day of reckoning, that day of judgment, may be very happy, or quite frightening, depending on what is in our hearts.

Jesus tells us that He is the way home. In Jesus Christ we have the road-map for the way home to God. Jesus is the way. If you want to go to the land of Oz, you follow the yellow brick road. But if you want to get home, to our eternal home with God, you follow Jesus Christ. Putting our faith in Him, there is the promise of eternal life.

But we also need to know that Jesus didn't come to earth just so that we could go to Heaven. Jesus lived and died to show us how to live our lives the right way. He taught us the way of love, of compassion for the person in need, of justice for the poor and forgiveness for our enemy.

Jesus not only died for the forgiveness of sin, but he *lived* to show us the way.

Each day we wake up we have 86,400 seconds deposited into the bank of our life. We have the choice, as it says in Deuteronomy, to choose either life or death, to live God's way or our own way. One way leads to life, the other results in death.

Today we baptized an infant boy. His parents have put his feet on the path that leads to life. The waters of baptism are not magical. Water does not guarantee that a person will go to Heaven. But it does symbolize a life that has been dedicated to loving and following Jesus. Logan will need good role models to help him choose the ways that lead to life eternal. When he is old enough, at confirmation, Logan will have the choice to follow Jesus as his Lord and Savior, for himself.

We as the body of Christ need to surround this young family with love. Yes, sins are forgiven. Baptism works both backward and forward in time. Logan's future sins are already covered by the water of baptism and the blood of Jesus. But it does matter the kind of life that we live.

Once a person is baptized, the Holy Spirit begins its work to sanctify and to make holy that person. We can cooperate with the work of the Spirit, or we can resist. God does not take away our freedom at baptism. Each and every day, we have 86,400 seconds to live. How we spend that time matters! Our choices do matter.

Are we using our time and our talent to love God and serve our neighbor? Or do we use our time and our talent to accumulate wealth just for our own satisfaction? Do we weigh our choices, and think about whether what we are doing is good, or right, or helpful? Or do we just plow through life not giving any thought at all as to how we live and how it affects others? Choose this day, life or death. The choices we make matter.

I think we have all become aware of the Penn State sex scandal. Jerry

Sandusky, a former assistant coach of the Nittany Lions, is accused of molesting young boys over a 15 year period. Before this scandal came to light, Mr. Sandusky was viewed by many as a man of integrity, who worked tirelessly to help disadvantaged youth. He was well respected by the Penn State community. Joe Paterno had a stellar career until these allegations were brought to light.

My point is this. We can confuse ourselves into thinking that we are living a godly life because over here we're doing all this good - going to church, serving on committees, helping in the community and so forth. But many people have compartmentalized their lives and have secrets. And they believe that what happens over here won't affect what happens in this part of their life.

Many people believe that if they're good enough, they're entitled to a few indiscretions and vices. My dear friends, we can't harbor any evil and pretend that we're living the Jesus life. 86,400 seconds a day. And every choice that we make matters.

Jesus said a person may not have committed adultery, but if they lust in their heart they've already sinned. Jesus said a person may not have committed murder, but if they harbor anger and resentment, that too is sin. Jesus said it is easier for a rich person to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for that person to enter the Kingdom of God.

You see, once you give your life to God, it all matters. Maybe that's why so many people don't want to become Christians today. They know what price they'll have to pay, and they're not willing to pay it. Jesus doesn't ask for 10%; Jesus wants 100% of who we are.

All of our thoughts, all of our words, all of our motives, all of our actions. It all matters. Life is an investment. 86,400 seconds a day. What a marvelous gift we

have been given. Life is so precious. I don't want to waste a second of that precious gift. And I pray to God that I am spending those seconds wisely, making good choices.

None of us is perfect. We don't get it right all of the time. But with God's grace and love and forgiveness, we put our feet on the path and continue the journey. Beloved in Christ, how will you invest your 86,400 seconds today? Let us pray.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and Merciful God, we come to you today with humble hearts. We come seeking healing for our loved ones, and for the needs of a broken world. Our Father in heaven, hear our prayers for all who are sick, for those in the hospital, for those in nursing homes, for those who don't get out of their homes. Touch them with your love and your healing power. Bring to them a word of hope. Strengthen those who love them, and those who care for them.

Lord, if we've been listening to the news this past week, we have become aware of yet another sex scandal involving children. This time it has gained national attention because it involves a well respected football program. But the real tragedy in this story is not the tarnished reputation of Penn State, or the loss of a few men's careers. The real tragedy is that more children are being molested. Most of them never make the news. It goes on in our own communities. Sometimes it happens among our own church families.

Lord, we pray for the victims of abuse, that they could find the help they need to recover, and to rebuild their lives. We pray for a culture that is hyper-sexualized, and where every sexual desire seems to be okay. We pray for those who perpetrate crimes, and for those who battle addictions that seem beyond their power or control. Lord, we pray for healing, the healing of the human race that has perverted your good gifts and twisted them into something ugly. Lord, help us recover and reclaim the goodness of our sexuality in a society that has grossly abused this good gift.

Almighty God, on this Veterans Day weekend, we acknowledge the men and women who have served our country. Thank you for their service. Thank you for

their sacrifices. We pray for those who continue to make sacrifices for their country, putting their bodies in harm's way. We pray for those who return from combat with wounds, either physical or mental. God bless our country, our president and all who are in authority. Guide their decisions that they may follow your precepts and commandments in all that they do.

Loving God, we pray for ourselves. You know the lives we live, the choices we face, the hardships we suffer, the trials we are going through, the burdens that we carry.

Send us your Holy Spirit, as you promised. We yoke ourselves to Jesus, and claim his promise that our burdens would be lighter. Hear our prayers we ask in his holy name. And as he taught us we say together, "Our Father...."