

First Presbyterian Church, Sylacauga, AL
The Rev. James B. Stanford III
September 20, 2009

I Timothy 6:17

“Simplicity and Trust”

*“Command them not ... to set their hope on the uncertainties of riches,
but rather on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy.” --- I Timothy 6:17*

We begin a sermon series this morning, and for the next several weeks the key words are: JOY ... SIMPLICITY ... GENEROSITY.

You are familiar with the words of a Shaker song that come to mind ... lyrics, which call us back to simplicity and trustfulness. It is a one-verse Shaker hymn, but it speaks of being free from the tyranny of things and from the obsessiveness of worry. It goes:

‘Tis a gift to be simple, ‘tis a gift to be free.
‘Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be.
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
‘Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gain’d,
To bow and to bend we shan’t be asham’d,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come out right.

The Crisis of Faith

When we don’t pay attention to our heart ... to our soul, then our treasure can be in the wrong things. So, when something happens --- a crisis ... an illness ... financial difficulties ... some unexpected, unplanned-for emergency that changes our lives ... suddenly, we realize what is really important. And those other things ... they just fade away.

As I was beginning my ministry, the noted Baptist preacher, Dr. Carlyle Marney, was finishing his. Dr. Marney used to love to preach on Psalm 37. “Fret not,” the psalmist begins, and then goes on to say: “Trust in the Lord, and do good, so you will dwell in the land and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Carlyle Marney would translate Psalm 37 to read: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will change your *wander* (not *W-o-n-d-e-r* but *W-a-n-d-e-r*!)” Think about that play-on-words. Marney also translated it this way: “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will teach you what your heart can afford to want.”

The Economic Reasons For Hope

This is a remarkable and frightening time for our country. Federal Reserve Chairman, Ben Bernanke, said this week that the recession was quite likely over. That may be true, but the crisis of faith is far from being over. When we can't trust our financial institutions, we find ourselves afraid, and that fear often leads to either cynicism or panic.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt faced such fear in 1933, so in his first inaugural address he spoke these famous words:

“... Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself --- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

My friends, it is not a question of “if” but “when” ... when will recovery start and when will it pick up momentum? In the meantime, while we wait for this to happen, the economic reality is that some people are losing their jobs and others are losing their homes. Some may need to sell, while others may need financial help and support. Hopefully, there are many who can weather the effects of the financial crisis without significant loss. However, none of us must allow ourselves to be controlled by fear. The Bible and our faith in God reassure us that we are going to be all right. What I said to the children just a moment ago I deeply believe: we are to trust God who keeps His eye on us.

The words of Psalm 121 are words for every moment of every day: “The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore.” Thanks be to God!

Nevertheless, listen to what Douglas Meeks has written his book, GOD THE ECONOMIST. He contends that in North Americans have chosen to order our lives by the logic of the market where everything is seen as a commodity ... a commodity to be used ... depleted ... hoarded ... or cast away. So when we take the next step and move from things to people, looking at our relationships, (considering) those around us, (we do so) from that market perspective...

He writes, “If our worth is based on what we know or own or achieve, we are always going to be insecure, because our value will depend on that which is precarious and temporary. Instead of loving one another ... nurturing the well-being of one another ... we will compete with one another, use one another, abuse one another, and then discard one another.”

That is harsh criticism ... but true. Yet, if economics is not your favorite subject, listen to the words of James 5:1-6: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you. You have laid up treasure for the last days. ... You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have killed the righteous person; he does not resist you.”

Finding Faith in the Midst of Financial Crisis

When we say The Apostles' Creed, we begin: "I believe in God the Father Almighty." In the original Latin that would read: **Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem.** Our word "credit" comes from the Latin verb "credo", that means "I believe" or "I trust." To extend credit to someone is to believe or trust that he or she will repay. As Christians, our credo or trust is in God. Throughout the Bible, we find words of hope and promise that reminds us we have no reason to fear ... for God is our refuge and strength.

We are so much more than what we own ... so much more than things and the things which money can buy.

How do YOU measure your wealth? Is it what you believe in? What do you think it means to be rich? Can we be "rich in things and poor in soul?" That's a wonderful phrase --- "rich in things and poor in soul" --- and over the next several weeks we will look at it closely.

Do you have family? Friends? Are there people who love you?

Are you healthy? Can you walk? Or think? Do you have the capacity to imagine and reason?

What about your relationship with God? Does it provide you with hope and peace and comfort in difficult times? Does it make you a more loving, ethical person?

Can you appreciate art and music and all the others gifts which fill our world with beauty?

Can you enjoy the wonder of creation? Can you go outside and take pleasure in the flowers and the birds and trees. (Joy every Sunday morning to step into the Youth Room Kitchen and see what kind of flowers Sally had brought with her and how she and Patsy and Dorothy are arranging them.)

Do you have a meaningful joy that helps people and creates useful good ... that enriches the human experience?

Can you look across the table at your spouse and be moved to tears because every year you love them more?

Are you able to enjoy a meal with your friends, and conversation, and laughter, and delicious food?

Are you grateful for compassion and human kindness and people who ask how you're doing because they genuinely want to know?

Do you appreciate your pets and their non-judgmental affection?

At the end of the day is the world better because you're in it?

How do you measure your wealth? What do you think it means to be rich? We are so much more than what we own! (repeat)

The current crisis facing us today may be economic on the surface, but at its roots it is a spiritual crisis. All around us folks are anxious, but the church ... that means you and I ... must be a light that compels folks and invites folks to find joy in simplicity and in generosity.

**'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free,
'Tis a gift to come down where you ought to be.**

**To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come out right.**

Resources

Clayton A. Cobb, "Lessons from Life: Live Generously," St. Peter's By the Sea Presbyterian Church, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, 10-20-2001

Nancy D. Dean, "Awaking the Wisdom Within,"

Philip Gulley, "All the Ways To Be Rich", GRACE TALKS WITH PHILIP GULLEY (www.philipgulley.org/GRACETALKS.htm)

Adam Hamilton, introductory sermon, ENOUGH, p. 63-65

H. Stephen Shoemaker, "Simplicity and Trustfulness," Myers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC, 2-10-08