

Exodus 16:1-8 ~ Luke 22:1-8, 14-16, 19-23

Our Money Story: Rememberⁱ

1st of 4 Sermon Stewardship Series

20th after Pentecost ~ Service of Healing & Wholeness ~ October 23, 2022

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Introduction to Discovery Time & Sermon Series

The best stories captivate and transform us—they can change how we live. Throughout this four Sunday stewardship series that begins today, you will be invited to remember, release, reimagine and restore your money stories. Did you know you have a money story? We all do, whether we are aware of it or not. Our money story begins about when we are old enough to come forward for Discovery Time. As toddlers we start to be aware of our relationship to things. Things and experiences that cost money. We have parents who work to earn money. We go to the store with our parents to buy food and clothes and sometimes, on a good day, toys! Sometimes they buy them and sometimes they don't. Our money stories begin.

Our money story continues throughout our lifetime on earth. Yes, grownups need food and clothes, and we love toys, too. Sorting out what we need from what we want; deciding what to give and what to hold onto, gets trickier as we get older. Our money story is a story that you and God are still writing together. We are going to consider over the next four weeks, how close our money story is to the one that God is begging us to live into. Just imagine, if we let God become the center of our money story: as individuals and as the body of Christ we call FPC.

I *am* about to invite the children forward for Discovery Time, like usual. But Discovery Time is going to be a little different. It will include all of you, not only the children who come forward, in art-making as a spiritual practice. Over four Sundays, together we are going to create a mandala mosaic. Will the children please come forward now, and let's begin.

- The word "Mandala" means "circle" in Sanskrit. It is a geometric, circular design used in Buddhist and Hindu traditions for meditation and prayer. We have a mandala at FPC: our outdoor labyrinth. The labyrinth is a Christian prayer practice that became popular way back in the Middle Ages – over 1500 years ago!
- In all these traditions, including our own, the mandala represents a cosmos or universe and is used for transformation and healing.
- Each week in this series, we will add a ring to our Mandala beginning from the inner circle, working out.
- Today's center ring, we will make with our pipe cleaners. The shape is inspired by both of our scripture lessons: the one we just heard about the struggle of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the one we are about to hear about Judas' betrayal of Jesus, and the last supper. It can remind us of several things: Manna meal, silver coins, dinner plates, communion wafers.
- In both stories everyone, the complainers, betrayers, deniers, and doubters *all* are welcome at God's table where all are fed what they need. And all are given enough.

Now, all together, I invite each one of you children and everyone in the pews into a time of embodied prayer, using your pipe cleaner. You can leave your eyes open or close them for this prayer—do what is most comfortable for you.

- First, take your pipe cleaner and hold one end in your hands and curl the tip inward like this to form a spiral. Throughout the prayer, listen for the word, “remember,” and slowly curl your pipe cleaner into a flat spiral. By the end of the prayer, your pipe cleaner will look something like this (*show what it looks like curled into a round spiral*).
- After we are finished, the children will collect your spirals with these baskets on their way to Sunday School. They will be added to the mandala mosaic art project.

While holding and shaping our pipe cleaners, let us pray:

- ❖ The story of God calls us to remember that creation was made good.
- ❖ The story of God calls us to remember that we belong to one another, for we are bone of bone and flesh of flesh.
- ❖ The story of God calls us to remember that to restore friendship between siblings is holy.
- ❖ The story of God calls us to remember that the wilderness is real, and that God will be with us, raining down manna and speaking in a still, small voice.
- ❖ The story of God calls us to remember that Jesus showed us what love looks like.
- ❖ So, as we remember, may we believe—in a God who made all things good, who stands with the suffering, walks with us in the wilderness, sees the overlooked, loves with an untamed heart, and makes room for all at God’s table.

Amen. (After the prayer, the children were dismissed to Sunday School.)

You may be thinking about now, four Sundays on stewardship? Come on Pastor, can’t we just make our financial pledges for 2023, and be done with all this money talk in church? Give me a miracle story, a parable, Jesus’ teaching on prayer, something, *anything* more spiritual and uplifting than money. At the grocery store, when we pay our electric bill: Inflation is crushing us. Interest rates are through the roof, politicians and political interest groups are badgering us for money every time we go to our mailbox or open our phones and computers. *Please*, give us a break from all this money talk here in church.

I could do that if we were here to worship someone other than Jesus. But Jesus who loves us dearly, Jesus who gave his all for all of us, Jesus who heals us, who forgives us, who makes us whole; yes, *that Jesus*. He talked often about money and possessions that if I preached the same percentage of sermons on money and possessions as Jesus did, I would preach seventeen Sundays on the theme of money every year. So, you see, I am giving you a big break with only *four* Sundays this stewardship season.

It is Jesus who teaches us that our money story is a spiritual story. Our check book, whether we still use an “old school” paper pad check register or keep track of our checking and charge accounts online; Whether we use bitcoin, cryptocurrency, or good old dollars and cents: the record of what we spend and how we spend it, is a faith statement. This record tells the truth about your money story. What we spend, how we spend, save, give away, and invest our money reveals what we truly value.

Introduction to Gospel Reading

So, let's get on with it! For our second scripture reading on this first Sunday in our Money Story sermon series, we are going to take a giant leap, from Moses and the Israelites out in the Wilderness of Sin, about 1250 years before Christ was born—all the way to Jesus' last supper in the upper room with his disciples. They have gathered to remember and celebrate the very story we just heard a piece of. The story of God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the story of God's provision for them in the wilderness as they made their way to the Promised Land. They have gathered to remember the Exodus and to celebrate God's saving act. But on this night fear hung heavy in the air, again. It wasn't starvation in the wilderness they were afraid of that night. The threat to Jesus and what he was doing and saying had raised a cloud of fear and apprehension so thick they could hardly breathe.

Judas wanted the nightmare to end. At this point, Jesus was stirring up trouble with the religious authorities everywhere he turned. Jesus was trying to reform and renew his own religious tradition and so, of course, those in power felt threatened. Get rid of Jesus and that threat would be gone. Judas wants security, assurance, quick relief. He wants to go back to how things used to be. Fueled by fear, evil enters Judas' story. There was money to be made on fear: then and now. Judas decided to monetize the fear of the religious leaders. At that table, Jesus knew that Judas had already set the betrayal in motion. A deal had been reached: blood money promised.

The Table of terror was set. Jesus knew at this table on this night, at the Passover meal of all places, was his last chance to show them the ultimate power of Divine Love over all the darkness that was about to come down. What could he do, so what could he say, that would sink so deep, they would remember??

Sermon

Do you remember your first home address? You were probably about five years old, when your parent or Kindergarten teacher taught you to memorize it. Mine was: 150 E. Palisade Avenue, Englewood, New Jersey. What was yours? Turn to the person sitting beside you and share your first home address with them... Remembering where home is, that's very important. Both as a life skill for a 5-year-old, and on a deeper level, for all of us throughout our earthly lives. Home, as shorthand for remembering where we're from, remembering our core identity: who we are, and who loves us. No matter what happens to us. When we are at home, we are able to live by faith rather than by fear, no matter how scared we get.

That's the kind of remembering we are starting with today to set our money story on holy ground. Of course, as we age, it gets harder to remember even what we had for breakfast, or what we did yesterday. On other hand, there are those things that we'd like to forget, but cannot. Like last week's football game between the Green Bay Packers and the New York Jets, four sacks against Aaron Rodgers and all. Too soon? And yet, no matter how badly a Packers' game goes, or even a whole season goes, our loyalty to the green and gold lives on, yes? Multiply by 10,000 your loyalty to the Packers or the Badgers or whatever team is closest to your

heart, and we are not even close to the depth of God's loyalty, God's "all in" commitment to each of us no matter how many bad plays we make.

The problem is that we *do* forget. We forget our spiritual home address: this bread his body, this cup his blood. When Jesus said, "Do this remembering me" he is not saying, "do this, remembering the church" or "do this remembering, the Apostles' creed," or believe these laws or say these certain words, he said, "Remember me." He's calling us back, grounding us again in the body, the face of Divine Love. Divine economy where 5 loaves and 2 fish feed 5,000 people with 12 baskets of leftovers. Divine Love where bread is broken and everyone at the table is served: the complainer, the betrayer, the denier, the doubter. Where healing happens. From brokenness, we are healed and made whole. Again and again. Scarcity, fear and conflict will always threaten to dismember our story. They can distort our relationship with money. And so, we start our Money story series by remembering that God has a greater story to tell—a story that re-members us and makes us whole.

This past Wednesday, Elder Lisa Carroll and I took home communion to some of our FPC members who are not able to get here to worship in person on a Sunday morning anymore. After a bit of conversation, we set up the communion table: sometimes we use the flat plastic seat of a walker/rollator, other times a sticky, cluttered hospital tray table, it doesn't matter. Next, with a few sacred words and prayer, with a speck of bread and barely a teaspoon of juice, it is enough. It is enough to help us remember who and whose we are. It is enough to help us remember we are part of a much larger story of belonging and purpose: whatever our address happens to be. It is easier to remember together. Over the years of sharing home communion, I never cease to be amazed at how this sacred meal triggers memory. It mysteriously reconnects, re-members bodies, minds, and spirits fractured and diminished by disease and dementia. Soft voices of folks no longer able to remember where they are, their first or last address, or the names of their grandchildren, can remember the words to the Lord's Prayer.

What about us today? I have two quick takeaways if you want to remember Jesus. First, begin from a place of prayer, not ideology. Begin with thanks for God's presence, grace, the gift of creation that connects us all. Second, Practice works of mercy—make sure your hands are touching the hands of someone who is suffering, including mother earth.ⁱⁱ Let us end this sermon now together, in prayer. The prayer that Jesus gave us to help us reconnect, remember who and whose we are. Some call it the Lord's Prayer. Today I am calling it our home address. It starts with, "Our Father, not "my father," it includes a prayer of provision for all, for the power of forgiveness, and for help with the challenge to choose good over evil, to choose God's realm of love and justice every time. To remember Jesus. Let us pray....

ⁱ "Our Money Story" stewardship theme was created by A Sanctified Art LLC, sanctifiedart.org.

ⁱⁱ Adam Bucko, *Let Your Heartbreak Be Your Guide: Lessons in Engaged Contemplation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 125, 128, 131–132.