



Building Community
Changing Lives
Bringing Hope

SUMMIT
C H U R C H

Being Jesus Christ to the World

A United Methodist Congregation

“Save More and Spend Less: Practicing Faith with Our Soul”

Theme: 20/20 Vision - Leaning into a New Year with Hope

Sermon Scripture: Acts 20:35, Proverbs 11:25, 22:9, Luke 6:38

Family Activity for the Week: Create a family generosity chain. Cut several sheets of colored construction paper into strips. Every week give each family member one strip of paper. Have each person write his or her name on the paper strip and one way he or she served or gave to others that week. In addition to giving of time and energy, also include ways your family is giving money to church and others. Form the first slip into a circle and staple or tape the ends together, then add to that circle by connecting the strips together to create a chain. At the end of each month, review the acts of giving your family has shared in. Thank God for the privilege of being generous with God and others.

Monday, February 3 – Read Leviticus 25:23, Psalm 50:9-12. Israel in Jesus’ day had a few very rich people and many who were very poor. Jesus was not against wealth, but he was against giving wealth a higher priority than God. He challenged many of the rich, notably those who were religious leaders, telling them it is impossible to serve God and wealth. Those who usually saw all their wealth as a sign of God’s favor sneered. Jesus wouldn’t back down, saying the things that impress human beings often offend God because everything belongs to God.

▲ Leviticus 25 underscored one of Israel’s basic beliefs: God was the true owner of all the land and all the earth (see also Psalm 24:1). The law told all Israelites that they were, “immigrants and foreign guests,” on God’s land. In what ways can seeing yourself as an immigrant on God’s land, a steward using someone else’s property, shape your inward and outward responses to all your fellow “immigrants”?

▲ Psalm 50 reminds us that God owns everything. None of it is truly ours. In the same vein, Jesus described what he called “worldly wealth” in Luke 16:11 and as “someone else’s property” in verse 12. How might it alter your life to take that seriously? Would you drive God’s car the same way you do “yours”? Would you watch different things on God’s TV or computer? Would you spend God’s money any differently than you do “yours”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me keep growing in the sense of responsibility I bring to stewarding the portions of your world that you entrust to my care. Amen.

Tuesday, February 4 – Read Matthew 20:1-16, Luke 12:32. Jesus showed that God’s generosity goes way beyond “fairness.” People who worked all day watched the landowner pay people who’d only worked one hour the same amount that they had agreed to work for— and they got angry. We can imagine their pro-rated mental calculations. But the vineyard owner didn’t cheat them. Sadly, he asked the upset workers, “Are you resentful because I’m generous?”

▲ Does the master’s way of paying the workers in this story feel unfair to you? No one was underpaid, rather it seems like some received unreasonable generosity. Jesus said this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul said Christ was treated as we deserved, and we are treated as he deserved. In what ways does that “unfair” exchange deepen your gratitude for Christ’s generosity?

▲ Jesus said that there is no need for his “little flock” to fear. God generously delights in giving us the kingdom. In Matthew 6:27, he added the practical observation that worry does little good. Can you recall spending a lot of time and energy worrying about things that then never happened? How does worry differ from wise foresight or precautions? What are some more sustainable, useful ways of facing life’s challenges than worry?

Prayer: Loving God, every morning and every evening you delight in giving to me. Keep my generosity growing, even though it will never match the magnitude of yours. Amen.

Wednesday, February 5 – Read Luke 12:33-34, 48; Acts 20:35. Our culture often acts as though “mine” is one of the most priceless English words. Jesus always challenged our possessiveness. When we

loosen our grasp, he said, we can live lighter lives free of worry and stress. Investing our treasure, time and talent in God's mission to uplift and redeem the whole world is, according to Jesus, the one truly safe investment we can make.

▲ In verse 34, Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." True security and satisfaction, he taught, came from seeking God first, not from externals like food, clothing, or material possessions. How does Jesus' teaching challenge the ways you've learned to think and act about the level of security and satisfaction "stuff" can bring you?

▲ The principle in Acts 20:35, the only direct quote from Jesus not in any of the four gospels, is more often honored in words than in actions. We usually hear messages more like, "When I have received enough, then maybe I can start to [cautiously] give." How easy or hard is it for you to be generous with the money, time or possessions you have? What wishes or fears get in the way of generosity?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, when I stop to realize who you are, I realize that your whole earthly life was an act of massive generosity. Let that awareness inspire me to greater generosity in my life. Amen.*

Thursday, February 6—Read Matthew 25:34-40. Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment, using his familiar method of telling a short parable. The story highlighted his Kingdom's priorities. Kingdom citizens, he said, care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly-clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine." Jesus knew that it's often relatively easy to serve people doing well. He said we meet him particularly in those who are poor, sick, hungry—even in prison.

▲ We sometimes say we should "see the face of Jesus" in people in need and help them. In Jesus' story, both those welcomed, and the ones turned away, were surprised. We're one human family—and people treated unjustly, or facing poverty and illness, are "us" not "them." Jesus said, in the end we are all his brothers and sisters, and we are all in some type of need. In what ways can you sense God reshaping your attitudes toward "the least of these" in your community and world?

▲ Some think following Jesus only means giving up bad habits, learning large amounts of Scripture, or other "religious" acts. Jesus said those who inherit his kingdom live as his physical presence to meet the needs of the human family he loves. How can you bless Jesus, day to day, by actively working to help meet some of the needs in your family, neighborhood, at work, or in the world at large?

Prayer: *Loving Lord Jesus, I get so excited and joyful when I'm able to "give myself a gift." Help me expand my heart to be excited and joyful when I can direct that gift to others. Amen.*

Friday, February 7—Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Even to people who lived in the large city of Corinth, Paul used the language of harvest, of God increasing their crop. He challenged them (and us) to rethink what "rich" and "more than enough" really mean. God sows generously and asks us to produce a generous harvest.

▲ Paul's specific focus was an offering from Gentile Christians to support suffering Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Yet he kept talking about what God gives us: "everything you need always," "every kind of grace" and "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way." When (if ever) has a gift "left you speechless," with no words to fully describe it? How would you compare that feeling your response to God's gift(s) Paul spoke of?

▲ Why would God want us to give from free, grateful hearts without coercion or pressure? When have you felt the joy of giving freely from a grateful heart of love?

Prayer: *God of abundant life, teach me how to better calibrate my standard of "enough." And grow in me a heart that cheerfully welcomes invitations to give to bless others. Amen.*

Saturday, February 8—Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Paul urged Timothy to "run away" from a life that based its primary hope on finances. Instead, he called Timothy and the members of his congregation to a different view of what we today call "retirement planning." He said to actively "do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others" was the best way to lay a good foundation for the future. Those choices would enable them to take hold of "what is truly life."

▲ So much around us, including some approaches to retirement, tries to convince us that money is the most important part of a satisfying life. As scholar N. T. Wright said, "Every advertisement, every other television program, many movies and most political manifestos are designed, by subtle and not-so-subtle ways, to make us say, 'If only I had just a bit more money, then I would be content.'" What are the main drivers of the way you live your life? What kind of outcome to your life do you most wish to avoid? What life goal(s) are you pursuing with all your soul? What steps can you take today to resist the temptation to look to mainly to money for happiness, fulfillment, and ultimate security?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for being my ultimate mentor, guide, and accountability partner. Teach me to value what you value, to take hold of what is truly life. Amen.