

Week 4 of 4: How we SPEND money...

Our fall stewardship theme is “Kitchen Table Giving.” It’s a metaphor symbolizing those times and places where deep conversations occur that shape our lives. From our calendar to our bills, from our work to our leisure, from our income to our philanthropic giving - all of these and other important topics often bear fruit over a table.

This place mat is designed to be interactive! It’s yours to write, doodle, and share. May it be a unique starting point for a deep conversation about how we steward God’s resources as both individuals and as a church.

In Week 4, we explore how we SPEND money. Keep this close as you take in scripture, stories, and questions. For further scripture reading on how we SPEND money, see Genesis 12:2, Philippians 4:12-13, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Luke 6:31-38 (NRSV)

31 Jesus told his disciples, “Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Loving Creator is merciful.

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”



KITCHEN TABLE GIVING

Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church

A four-week stewardship series

For the week of November 18, 2018: HOW WE SPEND MONEY



What is the biggest, most expansive table, literally and/or figuratively, where you’ve been seated?

FILL THE PLATE! Use the place setting to write or draw all of the ways you experience or offer the core practice of **RISK-TAKING MISSION AND SERVICE** in the life of the church.



To people who are wrestling with the deepest questions in life, Jesus has infinite patience and understanding. But for people who claim to know and speak for God, but have hard, cold hearts, he is relentless. Jesus gets *angry!*

Let's say I bring my wife home some flowers. I mean, these are some beautiful flowers. I try to get the colors right, you know the drill. I bring them in the house, and I give them to her, and she is blown away.

She takes out a vase and she smiles and says, "This means so much that you were thinking of me, I'm so surprised!" And what if I say, "Well, I'm your husband. It's my duty."? It just doesn't work for you, does it? Or what if I said to her, "Well, you know, there was a sale and I wasn't really thinking of you, but it wasn't really a hassle, and they were cheap, and I figured, eh, it's not a big deal"? Or what if I just said to her, "Well, I figured you needed them."

Does she even want the flowers, anymore? No! Why? Because she wants my heart! And if she doesn't have my heart, my words and my actions don't mean a thing!

Is this how God feels?

One of the central prayers of Jesus's llive was called the Shma. And part of it goes like this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might."

We can go to mass or services or prayers every day. We can sing all the right songs, and we can recite all the right prayers, but if it's just going through the motions, what's the point?"

God says in the book of Isaiah, "These people, they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Sometimes we have to stop and ask why we do what we do. To keep the family happy? So that I don't feel guilty?

The Scriptures remind us that God doesn't want the empty ritual. God wants our hearts.

Do you give money away? Why? I mean, why give to a church or an institution or someone on TV? Because God needs it? God says in Psalm 50, "If I was hungry, I wouldn't tell you. The world's mine and everything in it." Do I give the right percentage out of my paycheck so God gets off my back? God gets what God wants and I can do what I want with the rest?

When God has my heart, I realize everything I have, I've been given. There's even a letter called Corinthians in which God commands people not to give out of compulsion or guilt or reluctance. The letter even goes on to say you should only give what you've decided in your heart to give, because God loves it when you give because you want to. If I am giving because I think I'm supposed to or because God needs it or so that I don't feel guilty, I should keep it. God doesn't want it!

There's another passage in the Bible where God is speaking to some extremely religious people and they've been going to temple and going through all the right ceremonies and yet they've been neglecting the needs of those around them.

And God speaks to them and says, "Your sacrifices and your offerings, what is this to me? I don't take any pleasure in this." God *hates* it, can't *stand* it, when we put on a religious show and then we ignore the poor and the broken and the marginalized and the oppressed. God even calls their gatherings evil. God says they've become like a burden, that God's soul hates them. God even says, "I am weary of them."

It's almost like God says, "I don't want those flowers."

God wants our hearts.

Because when God has our hearts, we'll start to care about the things God cares about. We'll start to care about the people that God cares about. God says seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. When you realize that you can do something about the suffering in the world, when you realize there's work to be done and you can do it, then your heart is starting to beat like God's.

Is church a building?! Like, an hour once a week?! Church is people! People whose hearts are beating more and more like God's. ...It means being a follower of Jesus. It's being connected with everything that's true and good and right. Everything that goes on around us that reminds us that there is so much more going on around us than we realize.

Could anything be more beautiful?

– Rob Bell, "Sunday," Nooma



First on your own... read the story and respond to the following:

What gifts have you given and received "from the heart"?

Have you ever felt yourself going through the motions? Thinking, "Let's just do what we did last year"? If so, what has compelled you into something new?"

Who has invested resources like time, attention, money, etc. into you?

Then in a group... share your individual responses and discuss the following:

What is a part of your life where you have gone through the motions?

What is your most meaningful story of giving or receiving mercy?

Rob Bell says, "God wants our hearts." What does it look like to give God your heart?

Make your connections... between the stories, your responses, and scripture.

Who is someone in your life who delights in giving gifts instead of keeping debts?

It's been said one can choose to live with an "attitude of gratitude." When was the last time someone saw this in your behavior?

What are you grateful for in the life of your church? What brings you delight and hope? What makes your heart burn for God?

Holy One, as we spend your gifts in this world, remind us of their graceful origin so we may be your giving hands and feet. Amen.

