

## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Genesis 28:18-22  
Luke 11:37-42

Faith Community  
October 22, 2006

### Introduction

I have good news – we have more than enough money to meet our 2007 budget! The bad news is it's still in your pockets!

Okay, that is an old joke in churches, but it makes a good point. We have more than enough to do effective ministry – if we have the will.

### I

There are dozens of programs, techniques, and schemes for doing stewardship in the church. Almost all of them say they will increase giving by thirty to fifty percent. Some even “guarantee” it. Many of them are just gimmicks – tricks to try to get people to pledge more. They are gimmicks and most people see right through them. We haven't used them here for a number of reasons. One reason is that percentage giving is just what Christians do. It's part of our faith to set aside a portion of what we've been given for the causes of God. It's simply part of what it means to be Christian.

Sure, this sounds crazy to some people. We've been trained to spend our money on ourselves, to make sure we are comfortable before we think of other people, to keep our money safe; to protect it. So giving a percentage of it away for God's purposes in the world can seem strange to some people. But tithing has been an important part of our faith from the very beginning. When we pledge a percentage of our income we join an enormous throng of people who have made this their way of life. It goes back to before history began.

### II

Our command to give is related to our command to love. Christ commanded that we love each other. That is at the heart of Christianity. Our giving is loving others. It is caring for people we haven't even met. It is feeding the hungry, offering shelter to the homeless, healing the sick. Our giving supports the Halleads, our missionaries in Ghana, West Africa, through vaccinations it prevents the pain of illness for poor people. It also helps people find jobs in our own area.

Right here it helps our children know and grow up in the Christian faith.

Sharing is caring. All of these are acts of love that Christ commanded us to do. Christ told us to extend our love beyond ourselves, beyond our families, and beyond our nation, to the entire world. That's what we are talking about here. This kind of compassionate giving is part of being Christian.

### III

Tithing also defines our relationship to money. A question that all of us have to ask ourselves is, “Do I own my money or does it own me? Do I hold my hold my possessions or do

they hold me?" *If you can't give it away, then it owns you.* To be Christian is to be free of the clutches of money. It means we are able to release our tight grasp on possessions and be free to use them.

To be Christian is to know that you won't be taking it with you – and you won't need it where you're going.

You will have a hard time finding a place where your money is better spent than right here. I don't know where a dollar is more efficiently used, where it is more effectively applied. We stretch every dollar to the limit. I have often thought that if a company had to operate with a budget like a church's, it would declare bankruptcy and just fold.

#### IV

I want to be clear that we are not talking about maintaining an institution here – we're talking about serving Jesus Christ. Yes, we have expenses in keeping up the building, but the building is here to serve Christ. We pay staff people because they are specifically trained to teach us how to grow in our faith and to serve Christ better. We care for tables and chairs and copy machines and telephones because they are tools in training our kids and ourselves to serve Christ. Giving to Faith Community is giving to serve Christ. We could – and we would, if we had to – serve Christ without a building, chairs, or copy machine, but we wouldn't be able to do it as effectively. We are very clear that we are here to teach, learn, grow, and serve in the grace of Christ.

#### V

Maybe the most important aspect of stewardship is what it does for you. This is an opportunity for you to grow spiritually. You have a chance here to put down deeper roots of faith. Those parts of your life that you don't invest yourself in don't ultimately mean very much to you. If it doesn't cost you anything you probably don't value it much either. It is when we give ourselves to something that we find its real meaning.

You know when you begin an exercise program that it won't do you any good if it doesn't demand something of you. A workout program that's easy won't offer you many benefits. Instead, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

In a similar way a faith that asks nothing of us won't really help us either. If we don't give ourselves to it, it won't grow. If we never invest ourselves, we will never get any return. Giving because of our faith helps us grow in that faith.

#### Conclusion

When we fill out our pledge cards today, we are doing more than contributing some money to a church. We are supporting the service of Christ. We are acting in love as Jesus told us to. We are also strengthening our own faith, and putting down deeper roots. This is a spiritual opportunity to grow in our faith.

Amen