

Money Talks

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Sirach 35:8-13; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Matthew 6:1-21

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” -- Matthew 6:21

President Obama was in town not long ago; I’m sure some of you read about it, as I did, in the paper. He was out in Hunting Valley raising money for Democrats. According to the paper (10/17/10), guests paid between \$750 and \$5,000 a head to get inside one of the heated, well-lit tents on the property of David and Carole Carr and have a ham sandwich or a bowl of chili with the president and the first lady.

What chances would I have, do you think, of getting the president to come to the little blue bungalow I live in on Avondale Road in South Euclid? What response do you think I’d get from the president’s appointments secretary if I explained that I couldn’t charge \$750 or \$5,000 a head for the guests who’d likely show up – I probably shouldn’t ask most people in my circle to pay more than \$50 or \$100 for a bowl of chili with the president – but I sure would like for them to get the chance to meet the leader of the world’s oldest democracy and for him to get to meet them. If we really do have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shouldn’t president Obama get the chance to meet some of the people – my people – the ones who can’t afford \$5,000 for a bowl of chili? Do you think he’d come? Do you think I could even get Mrs. Obama to come?

You and I both know that the chances are pretty slim, not because I’m not a patriotic American or an engaged, informed citizen, but because money talks. Presidents, and a lot of other elected officials in our country, seem to follow the money, and they have been for a long time. I have a book in my study entitled *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, and although one of my political science professor friends says not to get too alarmed by that title or by the book’s thesis, I still can’t shake the feeling that our country – which includes all of us – is somehow up for sale.

Money talks. We’ve seen, much more than we’d care to, how effectively money talks in Cuyahoga County. We’re outraged, as we should be, that politicians can be bought – and sold – for something as paltry as a free new roof on their house or a re-fitted kitchen or bath.

So we know how money talks when it comes to crooks in office, but what about the rest of us? What about us middle-class types who don’t have the desire or connections to dive into the swill of politics? What is our money saying about us?

“Where your treasure is,” Jesus said, “there your heart will be, also.” That’s the twenty-first verse of the sixth chapter of Matthew’s gospel, and it’s not only the text for this morning’s sermon, but it’s also the theme for this year’s stewardship campaign, about which you’ve already heard.

I suspect that a fair number of us misquote that verse, if we try to quote it at all, and say something like, “For where your heart is, there will your treasure be, also.” But that’s not what Jesus said. He didn’t say our treasures follow our hearts; he said our hearts follow our treasure. He said that where we invest our material resources is where, sooner or later, we will invest our spiritual resources. Heart follows treasure.

I know that most of us don’t think that about ourselves because we like to think of ourselves as being in control of our hearts, our wills, our dispositions – our center of decision-making – and we decide what we’ll do with our money.

But Jesus saw things differently. He saw that the world makes a lot of decisions for us and tells us, in sometimes subtle and in sometimes not-so-subtle ways, how to use our money. I mentioned some of those decisions to you in the stewardship letter I sent to you last week. Homes, cars, education, insurance, retirement packages – these are the sorts of money decisions the world makes for you. You have to have these things the world says. You have to have a job. You have to have a place to live. You have to have decent benefits. And so on.

These are the sorts of things the world tells us we need to invest our treasure in. Not just our money, but much more important, our time, energy, and attention. Our lives, in other words. This world, with its buying and selling, its manipulated markets, its booms and its busts, its bubbles and its crashes – there, the world says, invest there.

Jesus says something different. He says to invest your treasure – your money, your time, your talent, your skills, your gifts, your life – in heaven, where there are no booms or busts, no bubbles or crashes. In his simpler economy he used the terms moth and rust and thieves breaking through to steal, but the point is the same. Heaven, wherever it is and whatever it may be, is not this world of buying and selling, gaining and losing, rich and poor, having and not having. Heaven is where God is, and in God’s economy, no one profits because they got there first.

What do you want your money to say about you? Do you want it to say to the world that you cared mainly about your own creature comforts and amusement? Do you want it to say that you built up a fortune that your descendants fought over and squandered? Do you want it to say that you wanted a strong, healthy church, but that you wanted it on the cheap? Do you want it to say that you didn’t care enough to free the leaders of your church from worrying about money so that they could devote their time and attention to the real work of the gospel?

Your money, my friends, will talk for you, whether you want it to or not. It has a way of making its presence felt, even if you keep it in a shoebox under your bed. The bad news is that none of us can escape the powerful influence of money; the good news, according to Jesus, is that we can choose how we will use that influence. We can use it in ways that will perish with us and all our possessions, or we can use it to build and become part of an imperishable legacy. Virtually all of us have to work hard for our money; that’s a given in our world.

What is not a given is whether we will, as a result of our hard work, cling to whatever money comes our way and reflect the world’s way of doing business – store up for ourselves treasures on earth, to use Jesus’ famous expression – or whether we will reflect God’s way of doing business, which is to give. We mirror our creator, friends, not in our buying and selling, but in our giving and living joyfully with the gift.

As the opportunity for you to renew your financial stewardship of this church returns once again, let your money talk, and let what it says tell the world who – and whose – you really are. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.