

*“Looking In”*

Last Sunday, we **Looked Back** to recall our experiences in our Whale – our Society’s complex and complicated money system. We remembered from whom we each learned our approach to living in the Whale – functioning with money. **Today, our theme and the sermon title, “Looking In”, moves our focus to deepen our self-awareness.**

Our movie resource, **“It’s A Wonderful Life”** included in the storyline George Bailey having an extraordinary experience, which enabled him to Look In and find a different answer to his difficulties than putting an end to his life. At the climax of George’s experience of an alternate reality, his guardian angel, Clarence, said to him, **“You’ve been given a great gift, George: a chance to see what the world would be like without you. ... Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives, and when he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”** Your life touches many other lives. How are the ways you spend your time and money life giving – fulfilling God’s Purpose?

Marcia McFee, who designed this Worship Series, wrote, “Becoming more in tune with what feels truly life-giving and what feels dread-producing will give us good clues about our heart’s desire for the long-haul and therefore, how we ‘spend’ our time and money — what ‘treasures’ we pursue.” After talking about an exercise suggested in the book resource for this Worship Series, McFee went on to state, **“Getting to see and witness how I could affect the world for the good by offering my resources (time, talent, money, energy) more generously was high on the list.”** “It made me want to spend more on mission and volunteer work and to support organizations who are affecting things I care about in the world. I would spend more time with friends around the table, offering beautiful food and conversation that buoys hope in the communities of which I am a part.”

Our Threshold Moment stated, **“This week our scripture speaks of ‘storing up treasures in heaven.’** “We will see that the treasures Jesus speaks of are the riches that come with the outpouring of relationship, love, grace, and hospitality. These things are ‘incorruptible’ rather than the accumulation of things that can become false gods.” **“How we ‘spend’ our treasures of time, energy, and money indicates what we love, what we value, how we want to impact the world.”** “This week we are invited to become more courageous, intentional, and visionary about how we serve God in the world through what we spend.”

Indeed, in the first third of our Scripture Reading, Jesus explained how we use our resources, including Time and Money, is crucial to our Identity and Relationship with God. He said in **verses 19-21, “Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are.”** “Your heart” is a metaphor for one’s true identity – essence – spirit or soul. Jesus called us to “store up riches” – all our resources in God’s Kingdom – to put our “heart” there, instead of in worldly, selfish, and temporary living.

Jesus summarized the Truth that “Looking In” we need to recognize our Identity – Purpose – Relationships are an important choice. Jesus said in **verse 24, “You cannot be a slave of two masters; you will hate one and love the other; you will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”** Instead of allowing the Money Whale to control us – put us in bondage, we need to make it a tool to enable us to do things in a way that we serve God and our Divine Parent’s Purposes. Making Money and Things our gods result in us living in bondage to those false gods and living self-destructive lives, which not only harm ourselves but also many other people.

In the resource book for this “A Wonderful Life” Worship Series, **“Integrating Money and Meaning: Practices for a Heart-Centered Life”**, a process is developed to enable us to be freed from bondage to the false gods of Money and Greed. The following quotes from the book help us understand that process. The author wrote, “Once we have taken an honest look at our past, our wounds, and our tendencies around money, it becomes easier to look at our relationships with money in the present moment. In hindsight, I see that I was doing this very thing in my own life as I ‘got up and dealt with my money.’ It didn’t occur to me at the time to think of it as spiritual practice, but I now see that it was — or, at least it was evolving into a spiritual practice. Most people start asking these bigger questions as they move along their life paths: **‘How much time do I have to spend on this journey, and what’s it for anyway? Am I accomplishing anything important or worthy? How do I tap into something deeper than the mundane tasks of my day?’** This is the bedrock of the spiritual path, and money is there.”

Referring to the problems people have with seeing an alternate approach to that of Money controlling them, the author continued, “They have a difficult time visualizing a new direction, much less taking steps to bring it to fruition, for fear of being disappointed or laughed at by others or internally.” **“This is the moment for courage — to move beyond this fear with trust in your vision and the recognition of its power and importance. This beacon is what I call your ‘courageous vision.’”** “The beginnings of it might be quite small — a realization that you want to add a morning walk or a five-minute meditation to your routine or change your eating habits. Or it may seem like the seed of something grander, like changing your career or how you spend your money. Whatever it is, trust it. Even if you feel only the initial stirrings of this vision, follow it.”

The author pointed out, **“A central tenant of the Christian religion is ‘incarnation’ — God interpenetrating humanity and the world through ‘the word made flesh,’ or ‘spirit incarnate.’”** “Similarly, we can be proactive in the creation of our own path and vision.” ... “Once you have a seed of your courageous vision in your line of sight, you will be amazed at how it can grow, if you pay attention. This is why it helps to ‘incarnate’ your vision in some way — with artwork or words or something else tangible. Such incarnation can help you recognize signs and symbols that speak to your vision.”

The author turned to that part of the process of being liberated from the false gods of Money and Fear in which a new approach is applied by asking, **“Does my work serve my courageous vision?” and ‘Is my work valued by the members of my tribe? Do the people I earn my money from value me?’”** The author went on to suggest, “If the answer to these questions is no, you may want to work toward a change in how you earn your money.” ... “You may never fulfill this goal to the level you’d like, but working toward it is part of the spiritual practice.”

The author moved to a specific detail of implementing the process as she suggested, **“Spending can be a powerful tool and can be a direct way to exercise the muscle of your courageous vision.”** “Do your purchases support your vision? Do you make conscious decisions when you spend?”

Finally, the author connected our financial giving to the process of carrying out our courageous vision by writing, **“For many, giving is an afterthought. The more focus we put on our courageous vision, though, the more giving becomes a deliberate piece of that vision.”** ... “Pay a lot of attention to this part of your money life. When you give, is it out of obligation or because it serves your courageous vision? What courageous visions of other people or organizations do you support? Do these visions align with your own? Does it serve the wider community? Do you give freely or with trepidation? Does it make you feel joyful or afraid?” ... **“Giving grows naturally from gratitude, whether it’s giving money, time, or anything else.”** “But gratitude does not come naturally for many of us. It’s a frame of mind that’s cultivated through practice.” ... “How you store your money also needs to align with your courageous vision.” **Our “courageous vision” is focused on using our money for living out the New Faith Relationship with God and All People – living the New Life in Jesus Christ – living Grace, Peace, Agape Love, and Hospitality.**

Many members and friends will recognize that for a very long time our Annual Consecrating Stewards Program for our Financial Stewardship has taken the same type of approach to giving that the author suggested. We are not asked to make Faith – Promise Commitments based on the church’s need for money for the support of the Budget but, instead, we are encouraged to make commitments and to give because giving back to God helps us fulfill our personal need to grow in our Faith Relationships with God. We give and make commitments because of the importance and value we put on our Relationship with God, instead of out of some obligation. **Giving for God’s Purposes enables us to show both gratitude for and the deepening of our Relationship with our Divine Parent. That is the ultimate outcome we are seeking when we “Look In” and implement our “courageous vision” – the fulfilling of the Call of the Divine through Jesus Christ as we Love and Serve God, instead of Money. Amen.**