

“Looking Out”

Last Sunday, the sermon included some quotes from this Worship Series’ resource book, **“Integrating Money and Meaning: Practices for a Heart-Centered Life”**. The author of the book recommended we use a process to enable us to move beyond the fears related to our living in our money system – our Whale. Central to that process is having a **“courageous vision”**. Among those quotes was, **“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.’”** Another quote was, “Your goal is serving your courageous vision and working for ‘your people.’ You may never fulfill this goal to the level you’d like, but working toward it is part of the” **“spiritual practice”**.

Focusing on the process of living out our “courageous vision” it is important for us to recognize it needs to be guided by our “spiritual practice”. As part of the Church, the Body of Jesus Christ, we are to follow his Teachings. In **Luke 10:27-28**, Jesus had an encounter with a Teacher of the Law, who asked him a question about the most important Law. Jesus asked the Lawyer to answer his own question. **Luke reported, “The man answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ ‘You are right,’ Jesus replied; ‘do this and you will live.’”** Our Spiritual Practice of Loving God and Loving our Neighbors is crucial for our living the New Life in Christ and making it our common “courageous vision”.

This Sunday’s focus on “Looking Out” includes the two subjects of Loving God and Agape Loving our Neighbors – All people. However, the intersection between the two is the Body of Christ – Believers – the Church, which enables us to connect the two targets of Agape. As members of the Body of Christ, each of us is part of the Church’s Ministry of Loving God and Loving Neighbor. This specific congregation of the Church Universal, Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, enables all of us to **Love God through our frequent Worship Celebrations and to Love our Neighbors through our Invitation, Welcome, and through being agents of God’s Forgiveness, Healing, and Comfort.** It is good for us to remember the importance of our members and friends being the Church in this place.

In addition to our Agape Loving our Neighbors, Jesus gave his disciples a specific New Commandment. On the last evening Jesus had with his followers before his execution, the gospel author reported Jesus said in **John 13:34-35, “And now I give you a new commandment: agape love one another. As I have agape loved you, so you must agape love one another. If you have agape love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”** So, in addition to Loving God with our all and Agape Loving All our Neighbors, we are especially called to Agape Love the Members of the Body of Christ.

“Looking Out” we need to focus on how we are to live our “courageous vision” with reference to Agape Loving All our Neighbors and one another. Our Threshold Moment stated, **“To be part of the early Christian movement was to be counter-cultural – concerned with a more equitable distribution of resources and care of those who needed the most help.”** “But this did not mean that those who had money could not help the movement. Benefactors were essential to the spread of Christianity and support of teachers and apostles. This week, we will explore how money, when coupled with alignment of values and vision for a more just world, could result in the kind of generosity that gives life not only to the movement, but to the giver.”

Again, the movement we have in common is the Body of Christ – the Church. **The Community of Believers, in part, aid us in the fulfilling of our “courageous vision” with reference to “Looking Out” for justice for those in need of Agape Love, including through economic support, through ministries to the poor, the oppressed, the grieving, the ill, and the vulnerable.** It is essential for us to remember our support through those ministries is possible because of our commitment through our committed participation in Worship, Study, Fellowship, and Service, as well as Financially. We will put more focus on supporting our common “courageous vision” and “spiritual practice” through our Faith – Promise Commitments and Donations during the coming weeks.

Today, we are putting more emphasis on individually **“Looking Out”** for persons in need. From our movie resource, we are provided with two approaches to dealing with money and the needs of others. One is of a person in bondage to money, such as Mr. Potter. The other is inferred from the criticism of the Potter character by the Peter Bailey and George Bailey characters. **We might call the opposite approach to Potter’s Way being Generous and Agape Loving.** Remember, our **“It’s a Wonderful Life”** movie clips revealed Peter Bailey said to Potter, “Mr. Potter, what makes you such a hard-skulled character? You have no family, no children.” **“You can’t begin to spend all the money you’ve got.”**

Recall also, how after Peter Bailey died and Potter was trying to close down the loan institution run by the Baileys, George responded, “Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you’re talking about ... they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn’t think so.” **“People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they’re cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you’ll ever be.”**

Marcia McFee shared, “The difference between the Baileys and the Potters of the world comes both in the inner and outer worlds.” McFee asked, “Do we reap love and generosity or bitterness and resentment?” She continued, “This week we ask if the outer manifestations of our money practices align with our courageous vision. Are we creating the impact for which we hope? at least moving in that direction?” She concluded, **“When our practices – no matter how incremental or seemingly simple – are serving the vision, we live with a sense of wholeheartedness and wonder that energizes us, those around us, and the world. We ‘truly live.’”**

In our Scripture Reading, the Apostle Paul specifically addressed how Christians with financial means are called to carry out their financial practices in his First Letter to Timothy. He wrote Timothy, **“Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, Who richly provides everything for our enjoyment.”** In other words, a rich person like Mr. Potter should not have been acting like Potter in the movie.

Paul went on to instruct Timothy, “Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others.” Both the Peter Bailey and George Bailey characters confronted Mr. Potter on his need to help the needy.

We didn’t show the clip today of when the townspeople came to George’s aid by donating money to help him to replace the missing \$5,000, of which Potter had possession of because of the ineptitude of Billy Bailey. However, it seems to me that what all those folks did to help George was an example of being generous and helping others. Indeed, the donating town’s people would have benefited from their generosity just as Paul explained to Timothy, **“When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.”**

Put another way, the author of our resource book quoted Sarah Bernhardt, **“Life engenders life. Energy creates energy. It is by spending oneself that we become rich.” That Agape Love type of life is the True Life shown in Jesus Christ!** The resource book went on to state, “Compassion and care for others is a central component of the spiritual path.” **“Spending money for the good of others can help the recipient, but it also helps the person who gives.”** “And it doesn’t have to be money, of course. Giving of your time and energy is just as important, if not more so.”

Our Youth/Young Adult Skit made a similar conclusion, “Doing the right thing, being kind, gentle, patient, and good, faithful, self-controlled, and generous are always good seeds to plant that will be harvested in abundance. **“We need to plant our best seeds and tend our lives as best we can – to be generous in thought, word, and deed – to love our neighbors – no matter how we’re treated in return. Because in the end, God has promised us: What we sow, we will reap abundantly.”**

Through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures, God has called us to “Look Out”, especially for those in need. **Fulfilling our “courageous vision” of Loving God with our All and All our Neighbors as ourselves leads us to be “Looking Out” for everyone, especially those who need to experience God’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Healing, New Relationship, and New Life in Christ.** The more we do that, including financially through this congregation, the more each of us will benefit from the blessings of a deeper Faith Relationship with God. **It is truly Wonder-Full that we reap what we sow – let’s reap the New and True Life that God has Sown and Revealed through Jesus Christ. Amen.**