

Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

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Bedford Presbyterian Church
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From the Bible: Isaiah 58: 6-12

[God speaking]

Is this not the fast which I choose,
To loosen the bonds of injustice,
To undo the thongs of the yoke,
And to let the oppressed go free
And break every yoke?
Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry
And bring the homeless poor into the house;
When you see the naked, to cover them;
And not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light will break out like the dawn,
And your healing shall spring up quickly;
And your vindicator will go before you;
The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
You will cry, and God will say, 'Here I am.'
If you remove the yoke from your midst,
The pointing of the finger and speaking of evil,
If you offer yourself to the hungry
And satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
Then your light will rise in darkness
And your gloom will become like the noonday.
The LORD will continually guide you,
And satisfy your needs in parched places,
And give strength to your bones;
And you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
You will raise the foundations of many generations;
And you will be called the repairer of the breach,
The restorer of the streets in which to live.

Sermon :

I want to think with you for a few moments about money...and how it is spent and what it means. So, to jump in (and maybe I am jumping in way over my head) here are some examples, some statistics of how money is spent that I thought you might find interesting, and maybe even thought provoking.

- According to several news sources I found online, Kim Kardashian, the TV personality and entrepreneur, spends about \$8000/month on health and beauty treatments.

- According to the US Census Bureau, the median household income in New York State is a little more than \$50,000.
- According to the US Department of Agriculture, a thrifty family or a family with limited income spends about \$150/week or \$600/month to feed a family of four.
- The average price of a store bought cup of coffee is about \$3.50. To make the same cup of coffee at home costs less than \$.50. If you drink one cup of coffee a day and made it at home rather than bought it on the way to work or your next meeting you would save about \$750/year.
- Each dollar donated to one of our local food pantries buys \$3.00 worth of food. Each \$50.00 donated could feed a family of four for a week
- In 2007 Americans spent \$13 Billion dollars on cosmetic surgery
- The estimated cost to provide clean drinking water for one person for one year is \$1.00.
- Roughly 1 million people, 70% of them children, die from malaria each year. A mosquito net, similar to what we use when we travel to Nicaragua costs about \$5.00 each.
- According to USA Today nearly \$ 2 Billion dollars will be spent on this year's Presidential campaign and nearly \$6 Billion dollars will be spent on all campaigns.
- It is estimated that to provide primary education for all children for a year would also cost \$6 billion dollars.

Okay...

Enough with the *"lies, damned lies and statistics."*

And, I know if we were so inclined, we could spend the rest of the day discussing or arguing over the relevancy of the data and what it means and how it relates to us, if it relates to us at all.

But, I started here today, because money matters.

We all know that.

And, how we spend our money matters.

Whether in our homes or in our government or at our schools or in this church.

I realize there may not a direct, linear correlation between how much is spent on cosmetic surgery and mosquito nets or between money spent on coffee and median household income, but I would argue that there is a connection. A connection that fundamentally has less to do with dollars and cents and more to do with values and vision.

Do we value botox more than preventing mosquito bites?

Do we value convenience over necessary groceries?

Jim Wallis, the Executive Director of Sojourners, a Christian organization in Washington DC is quick to remind readers that *"Budgets, whether national or personal, are moral documents. They reflect what is most important to us."* We may not directly ask or answer a question like the ones I asked a moment ago, but we do answer similar questions with the choices we make about the cars we drive, the checks we write, the purchases we charge. Whenever I find myself thinking or writing or in a conversation about questions like this I am reminded of the reflection I read or overheard at some point in time:

"If you want to know what someone really values, look at their checkbook."

Today, it would be "Look at their...or our...credit card statements."

Which brings me back to today...

And to the title I put in the bulletin for our message this morning:

Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

Today, here at Bedford Presbyterian Church, we celebrate Commitment Sunday.

The Sunday each fall when we ask members and friends to consider their financial support for the church for the coming year. As Matt shared with us earlier, some financial commitments have already

been received. More were put in the offering plate this morning. More will arrive in the mail or be sent online in the next several weeks. I am aware that this piece of paper is one way that you and I put our money where our mouth is.

- We don't just talk about those who are hungry; we help them to have enough groceries, and maybe even dare to discuss policy and practices that might alleviate hunger all together.
- We don't just tell our children and young people that they are to be nice to others; we provide opportunities for them to stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with others helping to build the world that we think God envisions.
- We don't just talk about hospitality; we practice it sometimes standing against the prescribed norms of the Presbyterian Church and traditional Christianity to practice what we preach.

To one degree or another each of you who has filled out a card or clicked the submit button on line or put money in the offering plate has *put their money where their mouth is* by saying:

This portion of my income I will commit...

- To something more than our own household expenses.
- To something more than our next family vacation.
- To something more than our next trip to the mall.
- To something more than myself.

And, in doing so...

If we take a moment to think about...

We have started a conversation with ourselves that has as much, if not more, to do with vision and values than it does with dollars and cents.

And, I believe that might be one of the most important conversations we can have.

And, so before I end this morning, I want to circle back to where I began.

Not to the statistics, but to the Bible and to the vision of wrapped up in the words of Isaiah.

What if the words sounded something like this:

*If you teach your children tolerance and to see in another the image of God;
If you make sure no child in your circle of influence goes to bed hungry this night;
If you open your eyes to see those who are most overlooked or neglected or forgotten;
If you give voice to their dreams and to their needs so that others might hear;
If your faith is strong enough to serve more as a bridge than a wall;
If you not only open your doors, but also open your hearts.
If you desire for your neighbor what you desire for yourself;
Then you will find God by your side
And the darkness that once crowded in upon you will become light;
And the emptiness that once swallowed up your hope will be filled;
And the hunger that you knew for meaning and purpose will be satisfied.
And you will be known as...
The repairer of the breach;
And those who restored the communities in which we live.*

May it be so, O God.

May it be so.