

First United Methodist Church

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Thank you, youth group. I'm really appreciating the Bible Reading Challenge. Especially the part about reading it more slowly, or reading until something catches your attention – and then you spend time reflecting on it, chewing on it, and listening for God's voice in it. This is a great way to read God's word each day!! One of the things I've discovered in this slower and focused reading of the Bible is how words or themes, at times, are repeated in a section, or chapter, of the Bible.

An example of this is that in chapter 6 of Matthew's story of Jesus' life, a word repeated in several of Jesus' teachings is that of "reward." In several teachings Jesus' makes the point that there is the "visible" and more "immediate" reward, and there is a more "invisible" and "later" or "delayed" reward. The point being made, as I understand it, is that the visible and immediate reward is really less fulfilling in the long run. A person may feel great in the moment, but that feeling quickly fades as the moment passes because the benefit of the "reward" also fades. But when the focus is more on the not-so-visible reward, the value and benefit last because the reward isn't about immediate reaction and praise.

What captures my interest about these passages that speak of "reward," is that ours is a culture that seems motivated by rewards. When I go shopping often the first question asked by the cashier is, "Are you a part of our rewards program?" I have even wrestled with the question "Should I use my credit card for this big item purchase because of the Reward Points I'll get, rather than paying cash (which I also have readily accessible)?" Yes, "Rewards are a hot item and big business today.

This idea of "rewards" is part of the struggle the "Church" or the faith communities have in our world today, I believe. So many of us long for immediate rewards, but the rewards that the faith has to offer aren't always immediate...or highly visible. The youth, with their Bible Challenge, are helping us all understand the value or reward of reading the Bible isn't necessarily what you'll receive in that moment of reading. The real value or reward is gained through the pattern and discipline of daily reading from God's word...and the guidance, hope, encouragement, challenge, peace, etc. that reading God's word will provide for you. But again, the real benefit or reward is gained over time.

Even in our giving, sometimes people are simply tempted to give to projects that they can see now (immediate reward). But I believe the Bible often teaches us that through consistent giving for God's Glory and to God's Purposes, a sense of joy develops within us through the experience of giving and realizing that we have been blessed and we are blessing others by living out God's Kingdom Values through how we live and give.

Today the challenge for each of us is to consider the rewards that motivate us and that we seek after. I invite you to read Matthew 6 and reflect on the passages meaning each time you come across the word "reward." Again...thank you Youth. You're helping me grow.

Serving Together,
Pastor Keith

Join us for worship this Sunday as we begin our Advent Journey to Bethlehem and Christmas. Our Christmas decorations are up and looking great!! This Sunday we begin a new sermon series, "Discovering Your Strength...in Weakness." Doesn't that sound backward? But really, the Christmas Story seems backward, at least by our cultures standards. Worship on Sunday begins at 8:30 and 11:00 am. Communion will be served at both services. Sunday School begins at 9:45am. Also, an advent study "Faithful" will be held Sunday morning at 9:45 in S2 for those who aren't involved in another Adult Sunday School Class. Come Join Us.