

Fully Alive With The Passion Of Christ – By Faith

4- Building for the Future

2 Samuel 24:18-24

2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 9:6-10

Luke 19:1-10

October 22, 2023

Building For the Future/Living in Faith Sunday Dr. Edwin Gray Hurley

You may be acquainted with a remarkable invention- the three-legged stool. Not as cumbersome as the conventional four-legged chair. When the three legs are properly balanced and proportioned it is amazingly strong, strong enough to support anyone who uses it, and can be easily moved around and made to fit into about any space.

In our society it has long been demonstrated that the three-legged stool that supports our whole moral, ethical, meaningful way of life in this nation has been **the home, the church, and the school**. Although each of these three has been assaulted, knocked around, and weakened in recent years- and in some cases thrown out of balance – sometimes with a leg even being broken off - there is this growing awareness that these three support systems have made it possible for us to live in “a democratic land the people rule” as one nation “under God, invisible with liberty and justice for all.” The balanced harmonious renewal of the home, the church, and the school is vitally needed in our divided land and world! Earlier in the 20th Century William Pierson Merrill could write and sing, “For the priceless gift of Freedom, For the home, the church, the school, For the open door to manhood, in a land the people rule.”

As we are focusing on Stewardship in our **“Building for the Future”** effort over these weeks, to build anew this church with all the preparation that has been going on for many months, and really for several years, we are building on this three-legged stool. The Stewardship Stool that is-

-Grounded in Gratitude

-Revealed in Prayer

-Lived through Faith.

As I was beginning to write out this message last week I got a call from Tom Sweets, a dear pastor friend in Louisville, KY and I told him about this three-legged stewardship approach. He asked me if I knew about the three-legged stool of Scotland? “No”, I said. He said, “It is: **the Presbyterian Church, Golf and Scotch!** OK I thought you needed a moment of lightness. Now on to our purpose.

Throughout preparations for **“Building for the Future”** I have been well, not surprised, because I know the kind of people you are, committed in your faith through this congregation, South Highland Presbyterian Church. I have not been surprised but I have been gratified afresh as we have united our energy and our efforts into getting this building back into top condition

for future generations. I have been gratified that you once again have said, **“We will take care of the building yes, but we will also tithe 10% of what we give to mission, both locally and internationally.** It is this spirit of mission and ministry that drew Gayle and me to you 22 years ago, and that we have been so privileged to share with you. I have been gratified by the broad participation of the large number of volunteers – children, youth, young adults, middle aged folks and seniors who have taken leadership in arranging prayer walks, to every household encouraging your prayers, preparing written materials, recording on-line videos, making phone calls, opening your homes for gatherings, and offering advance financial commitments- something I will get to shortly, in this amazing effort of **“Building For The Future.”**

Stewardship, you see, is not simply about giving money so the church can pay its bills and do the work we are called to do. Stewardship is our grateful, prayerful, faithful response to the faithfulness of God. As Paul writes the Corinthians,

“They gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us... For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part..”

Stewardship is taking care of those things God has entrusted to us for a season, recognizing it all belongs to God. As the Psalmist declared, “The earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”

Everything we have is on loan to us. Our time, our talents, our education, our resources, our health, these make up a sacred trust established in our name. “All that filters through our fingers is of God. We enter this world empty-handed, and we will leave it empty-handed. The question is, what are we doing with what we have while we are here?”ⁱ

It has been said, “You never see a U-Haul tied to the back of a hearse.” Stewardship is less about the Church’s need to receive and more about our need to give. To express it in a nutshell, “Givers are Livers.” Or as Winston Churchill said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”ⁱⁱ

We give because God has first given everything to us; in covenants, in promises, in material and spiritual blessings, and ultimately in giving himself, in the life, death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior and Lord. Through Christ we are given this three-legged stool. We are

Delivered from Sin,

Moved to give Sacrificially, and ultimately

Given Salvation unto new and eternal life...in,

As John Calvin puts it on your bulletin cover, “Thy celestial habitation, where there is reserved for us eternal rest and glory through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Each of our three Scripture readings today offers a leg of yet another three-legged stool for understanding about Stewardship which can help us focus on what God wants to do

through each of us as we with **gratitude, prayer and faith**, take up and respond to the two important requests your church is asking of you.

I

The first leg is **sacrificial giving**. In 2 Samuel 24, the last chapter of this book about the history of the rise of the Kingship in Israel, through many bloody sinful, intrigues, twists and turns, we conclude with David, having sinned yet again, you remember his earlier sin of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, in calling for a census across Israel, thereby demonstrating he was trusting in his own self-serving bureaucratic power, counting on people and money for security rather than the Lord, but he repents. "Afterward, David was stricken to the heart because he had numbered the people. David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done... O Lord, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant; for I have done very foolishly.' "iii

David is punished when the Lord sends a pestilence on the nation, but God cuts it short commanding the avenging angel to "relent concerning this evil... It is enough now stay your hand." Here at the end, David is commanded to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, on the spot where one day Solomon's Temple will be built. The book ends with David leading in worship and offering sacrifice.

Doing as God commands, he comes up to this man Araunah, who falls on his face before the King, overwhelmed by the presence of the King. Learning he wants to buy his threshing floor to build an altar to the Lord, so the plague may be averted, Araunah offers, "Take it o King, together with the oxen for the sacrifice." But King David insists, "**I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.** So, David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver... and built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being. So, the Lord answered his supplication for the land, and the plague was averted."iv

When we make an offering to the Lord we need to ask ourselves, is this a costly sacrifice or a little tip? Am I offering the best that I can, not compared to someone else, but compared with the resources that have been entrusted to me? Am I possibly going to put off a purchase for the home, a new car, a vacation, something I can delay or live without, in order to offer a costly sacrificial gift to God's church? Am I offering a tithe 10% or more, or am I offering a tip? And really now, these days tips generally start at 15% and often we are given suggestions of tipping at 20% and 25%, even 28% and more! Is what I am preparing to give costing me anything? "**I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.**"v

II

The second leg of this stool is **generous giving**. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church, he moves in two chapters, 8 and 9, where he encourages these Corinthians in generous giving. Some of them have been quite critical of Paul and his leadership. Yet he first praises them for their joyous generous giving, even in the midst of their own poverty.

Let me tell you a little story about our dear friends, members Frank and Geraldine Catalano. Each of them gives generously out of the rather meager resources they have back to the Lord through South Highland. And they give us so much by way of their love for us all. A few years ago, the Builders Class, where Geraldine was attending, would have special refreshments once a month. And some of the class members observed, with some discomfort, that Geraldine was repeatedly taking a large stack of cookies on these days, wrapping them in a napkin and putting them in her purse. What they only later discovered was that on Sunday afternoons Geraldine was attending our Sunday Club Gathering for special needs people, and there she was passing out these cookies to her Sunday Club friends!

Paul is praising the Corinthians for their generosity amid their own troubles, giving over and above to bring relief to the impoverished church in Jerusalem. He says,

“As you excel in faith, in knowledge, in eagerness, and in love, - so we want you to excel in this generous undertaking. For you know how generous Jesus Christ has been toward us, now complete what you began last year to do, according to your means.

He goes on using the imagery of a farmer,

“the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”^{vi}

The farmer sows seed abundantly because of faith that with sun, water and rich soil an abundant harvest can be expected. These Corinthians give generously because of their faith that God will work these gifts for the upbuilding the church in Jerusalem.

David Mc Kechnie, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston, some of you may remember when he came here a number of years ago as our Inspirational Preacher when the Legacy Wing was about to be built. He urged you to include the small auditorium in the plans, which you did. Dave has said, **“You may go broke for a hundred different reasons, but I know of no Christian who has gone broke as a result of the tithing of resources.”**^{vii} Sacrificial giving. Generous giving.

III

Finally, the third leg of this stool; **outsider giving**. One application of this is those of you visitors today – we are happy to receive your gifts too. In Luke we have the wonderful story of a despised tax collector named Zacchaeus who, in spite of his less than stellar background, he has overcharged people on their taxes, he has pocketed gifts intended for Caesar for himself. A pretty scary thing to do! Yet when Jesus comes to Jericho Zacchaeus is eager to see him. Unable to see Jesus through the crowd, he does something embarrassing which no upper middle-class adult would do wearing a dress or a business suit. Zacchaeus wearing his long robe climbs a tree so he can see Jesus. But Jesus spots him and calls him to come down and says, “I am coming to stay at your house today!

The upright, uptight religious leaders are shocked and the grumbling begins. “Jesus is going to be the guest of a sinner.” Have you ever known church people to grumble? Zacchaeus though, then and there, repents. He doesn’t walk the aisle or say the sinner’s prayer. He simply puts his new-found faith into action, **“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”** Jesus declares, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.”**

Jesus, you see, was always turning human expectations upside down. Often, he warned that the rich would have a hard time getting into God’s kingdom, hard as a camel squeezing through the eye of a needle. He told of a rich young ruler who when told that he had to sell everything he had and give to the poor and come and follow Jesus, turns his back on Jesus and walks away. The rich have a hard time following Jesus. Why- because rich folks have so many distractions, so many lesser gods they put their trust in, other than the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel. Jesus, in this encounter, however, shows that even this sawed off little social disaster with a big bank account is able to repent and give generously and be saved. He too is a child of Abraham and receives salvation.

IV

All three of these texts turn upside down our worldly way of valuing. David, taking a census but then repenting and offering a sacrifice that cost him a lot. The Corinthians, with all their imperfections making generous gifts to the poor in Jerusalem. And, an outsider, a despised tax collector – giving to the poor, repaying those he defrauded, given salvation and the Savior coming to stay in his home as his guest.

Friends all these people in these texts demonstrate what faith can do when we live it out. Now we as a congregation are being invited to **gratefully and prayerfully and faithfully offer a sacrificial gift to God**, to put down seeds and plant trees whose full growth many of us will never see. Such as Gayle and me.

Soon our 22-year season of ministry with you who we love so much, you with whom we have shared so much of life, will come to a completion. We will be leaving you for a time. Still we are so committed to you and to what God is going to do with this congregation in the future. Throughout our marriage Gayle and I have believed in and practiced tithing. So, we are personally making a regular stewardship pledge for 2024. We are also committing to the Building for the Future projects that have been set forth and so we are making a pledge, which for us is quite a stretch, a pledge of \$50,000. It is the largest gift we have made over our 44 years of marriage because we believe in what God is yet going to do through South Highland.

Already quite a number of South Highlanders have joined in this effort, even before it became a public appeal. I am pleased to share with you that as of today we have so far already received gifts and pledges for \$1,645,054.59 toward our goal, which includes our 10% mission

commitment, of \$2,400,000. Friends, we are over 60% there! Now we need everyone to all join in. At South Highland we do really believe what our vision statement declares, that with God at work in us, **“South Highland Presbyterian Church is fully alive with the passion of Christ.”**

And so, we will offer our Stewardship commitments grounded in gratitude, revealed in prayer, and lived through faith.”

In this week ahead I ask you, as we come up to our 135th Anniversary Celebration, to **gratefully and prayerfully and faithfully reflect on what God is calling you to give.** Commit with David not to offering a gift that costs you nothing. **May we all be and make a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is our spiritual worship.**

Amen.

Prayer – “God, what do you want to do through me?”

Amen.

ⁱ David McKechnie, Experiencing God's Pleasure

ⁱⁱ McKechnie, *ibid.* p. 128

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Samuel 24:10

^{iv} 2 Sam. 24:21-24 selected

^v 2 Sam. 24:24

^{vi} 2 Cor. 8:1-7, 9:6-7, selected

^{vii} McKechnie, *ibid.* p. 128