

Sermon for Gifts Sunday
Brandon Hamilton – October 21, 2007

Good Morning.

Welcome to gifts Sunday. My name is Brandon Hamilton. I was asked by the Stewardship committee to speak to you today about Stewardship here at Grace church. Today is the day we kick off our stewardship plan and ask you to support all of the various ministries here at Grace Church. Someone from Grace will be coming to your home to share their story of why Grace Church matters and asking you to make a pledge to support the ministries of Grace Church. I understand that for many this may be an uncomfortable or difficult thing to so I'm here to tell you this. God doesn't want your money.

Now before Father Pat or someone on the stewardship committee kicks me off the podium here for heresy listen carefully to how God really wants us to spend our treasure.

Where does one begin when asked to speak on Stewardship Sunday? I wrestled with that for awhile, prayed on it for awhile and I really was struggling with a way to talk to you about how to decide how much you are willing to give to support the ministries of Grace Church. I figured the best place to start would be today's readings.

In the Old Testament reading we find Jacob on a journey with his family. He sends his family and all his worldly possessions ahead. He is free to clear his head so to speak.

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And suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere he finds himself wrestling with someone. He even gets his hip knocked out of joint and yet he never gives up. It's like the lyrics to that song. "I get knocked down but I get up again. You're never going to keep me down". Jacob suddenly realizes that this is no mere man but that he is wrestling with God. He wrestles until he gets God's blessing. Jacob is so moved by this that he names the place Peniel which literally means "the Face of God". Have you ever wrestled with God? When I think about wrestling with God Deacon Colleen's story comes to mind. Those who have witnessed Deacon Colleen's struggle in the last few months have seen what that is like. Have a talk with her and she will tell you what it's like to truly wrestle with God. Deacon Colleen's journey is just one of the many gifts that grace Church has to offer.

Today God is calling us to wrestle over what we think this church is worth to us. In Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy he is reaching out to the Church leaders and asking them to remain faithful in Christ Jesus and keep pushing ahead and spread the good word of the Scriptures. Paul has instructed the leaders of the church to carry out their ministry and be persistent with the message. He has asked the leaders to convince, rebuke and encourage and have the utmost patience in teaching. But he also gives a warning that people will not put up with sound doctrine and will wander away to myths.

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This reading spoke out to me because I have been asked by the leaders of Grace Church to spread the good news of this Church and lead you away from one of the biggest myths our society has to offer. We have been led to believe that the accumulation of “things” will soothe our soul. We are living in a material world and we are constantly bombarded with the notion that whoever dies with the most toys wins.

I believe that our materialistic culture and our accumulation of stuff is what blocks many of us from building a closer relationships with each other and with God.

Are you going to fall into the trap of believing that material things are what give our life meaning? Or are you going to take a look at your life and your beliefs and examine your real priorities. Will you take the path that Jesus asks us to take?

You are going to be asked to give a portion of your treasure to the ministries of Grace Church. As I stated earlier God does not want your money. God wants us to give our money to the things that bring into a closer relationship with God, Jesus Christ and each other.

The most important thing that you can do to determine how much you are willing to give to Grace Church is to examine what it is about Grace Church that matters to you and what priority do you hold it in your life.

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If you send your kids to Sunday school .

If you enjoy the music.

If you enjoy the beauty of the architecture.

If you enjoy the history of this church.

If you are moved by the powerful sermons presented by the clergy.

If you feel good that you are helping those that our hungry.

If you were ever applauded the first time you stood up and introduced yourself to Grace Church.

If you've ever done Stations of the cross with Father Nat.

If you feel a sense of family here.

If you've made someone cry tears of joy when you've sung Christmas carols to them when they couldn't leave their house.

If you've been married here.

If you have cried at a funeral here.

If you've lit a candle on Christmas Eve while singing Silent night.

If your heart has leapt with joy at the sounds of trumpets on Easter morning.

If you've every gone hungry for 30 hours so that you could raise money for world hunger.

If you think coffee is best served in a "Grace Church" coffee mug.

If you like knowing that if your roof catches on you fire you will find a home here.

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If you like the intimacy of sitting in the choir pews at the Saturday evening service.

If you ran your first race at the Grace Race 5K.

If you know all the words to your favorite hymn by heart.

If you are excited about coming to the ordination of Mother Debbie.

If you've ever tasted the body and blood of Christ for the first time here.

If Martie has ever given you an angel.

If you've found a friend here.

If you ever received a "Care package" from the youth group while you were away at college.

If you've ever been asked the question "Where have you found God recently?"

If the answer to the previous question was "Here at Grace Church."

If you are proud when you say you are member at Grace Church

If you've ever accidentally said "Alleluia" out loud during Lent.

If you ever had a child at Kid's Alley café give you a hug and say thank you.

If you love making pancakes in the Grace Church kitchen.

If your dog was blessed at the "Blessing of the Animals"

If you ever volunteered at the Martin Luther King Day of service.

If you ever walked all the way across the church to hug someone during the peace.

If you've been inspired by others who have worked so hard to bring you Oktoberfest.

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If your child has ever been held in Father Pat's arms and introduced to the congregation on the day they were baptized.

If you've ever eaten lunch with the Bishop.

If you enjoy the beauty of the flowers on the altar.

If you came here seeking solace after 911.

If you like worshiping at a church that respects the dignity of every person regardless of sexual orientation.

If you've ever had the clergy hold your hand and pray for you when you were in the hospital.

If you've ever been asked to do something here you thought you couldn't do and surprised yourself by saying yes?

If you like the fact that the book "Davinchi Code" was discussed at coffee hour.

If you've ever gone on a retreat with Deacon Colleen and walked through a prayer labyrinth.

If you've ever wept when touched during the healing service.

If you've ever laughed so hard that your belly hurts at a church function.

If you've ever seen the face of God in those you have met at Grace church.

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So how many of these have you answered yes to? Aren't these the things in our lives that matter the most to us. Aren't these the things that we really live for and give our lives meaning. How do those things stack up against the material things in our lives?

In the Gospel today we are told of a judge who did not fear God and had no respect for people. A widow keeps asking for justice so many times that he finally breaks down and gives her what she wants to make her go away. This woman just keeps at it just like Jacob did when wrestling with God in the Old Testament. She doesn't give in and finally she prevails.

So Jesus tells us that if even an unjust judge will eventually answers us imagine how easily God will answer us. "He will quickly grant us justice". Gods gift are abundant and don't need to be asked for. But at the end of the reading there is an ominous question asked. When the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth?

That is the powerful question that hangs out there as we wrestle with what priority we want to make our giving to Grace church. Not only will Jesus find faith on the earth but will he find faith in our hearts to give Grace Church the priority it deserves in our lives. When I say that God is not asking for our money what I mean is that we are not being asked to make a check out directly to God. God is asking us to take our treasure and

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give it to the things that make us closer to each other and most importantly to God. I think Grace Church does that for us. It is our home where we grow closer to God through all the fantastic and worthwhile ministries of this church.

God is not like the unjust judge who has to be bugged again and again. God gives us the Gift of Grace without us even having to ask. Are we as gracious in our giving to Grace Church as God is to us?

So this morning on behalf of Grace Church I'd like to leave you with this simple question.

After thinking about all the Gifts this Church has to offer and weighing them against the material things in your life

Where is your priority?

Thank you.