

“What’s in Your Bucket?”

Joel 2:28; Colossians 3:1; Matthew 6:25-33

Reformation Sunday, October 27, 2013

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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(Walk down center aisle) I’d like to ask a question of anyone here under age 40: *“What’s this?”* It’s a coal bucket. When I checked “pictures of coal buckets” on the Internet, this bucket’s picture came up! So I imagine this one was pretty common.

What was it used for? When coal was used as home heating fuel it was used to bring coal from the coal bin to dump into the coal-burning furnace. At least in this part of the country, this feature of our homes is gone, replaced by oil or gas. But we still all have buckets, either literally or metaphorically. That’s what I want to talk about today: *“What’s in Your Bucket?”*

This title is shameless piracy of three common phrases: *“What’s in your wallet?”*, the marketing slogan of Capital One credit cards; *“kicking the bucket,”* which means “to die,” and *“bucket list,”* which is the list of things we hope to do before we “kick the bucket.”

So, what’s in your bucket?

For some of us, it’s money, things, possessions, the unbridled and incessant pursuit of wealth. It is, truly, “what’s in your wallet.” Carol and I are reading together our seasonal devotional guide Practicing Extravagant Generosity. If you are not yet reading it there is still time; and copies are in the back of the church this morning. It takes literally only a few minutes each day. Those reading it know from today’s reading that the author, United Methodist Bishop Robert Schnase says that *“When asked how much money they would need to earn to be happy, people of all different incomes answer the same. If they could only earn about twenty percent more than they presently do, they would finally arrive at a satisfying happiness.”* (1)

A brief personal reflection: many of you know I left a position to be your pastor in which I made nearly twice as much as I do not. I say this not to say “I’m all that” but simply to observe that in my personal life I know this illusion that more money will buy us satisfying happiness is just that: an illusion.

That said, I need a youth volunteer. (Josh Carr, age 12, volunteered). How much money are you making right now? So if I give you this (present them with a \$10 bill out of the bucket) how do you feel? Do you want to keep it? There is a catch. You must keep it and use it for some enjoyment. I have written down the serial number of this bill; and I will ask Mr. Griggs, our Head Counter and his team to watch for it; and under no circumstances is it to appear in this morning’s offering!

Why am I doing this (with my own money, just for the record)? Because I am not the “Bishop of Bling,” Bishop Frantz Peter Tebartz-van Elst of Limberg, Germany, summoned to the Vatican on Wednesday for spending \$45 million on his rectory. That’s a pretty dumb thing to do when your boss, Pope Francis, is driving a beat-up car, carrying his own bags, living in a simple room instead of the Papal apartment, and washing the feet of his bishops. (2)

I am doing it as a reminder that we are recipients of an extravagant generosity: a God of love who has given his only Son for our redemption; who wants us to take joy in life; who wants us to know that there is such a thing as healthy and spiritual receiving. And I am doing it as an antidote to this notion that we need 20% more to be happy. Jesus is unmistakably clear in today’s Gospel: *“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these....therefore do not worry...your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* (3)

“What’s in Your Wallet?” doesn’t do one thing to keep us from “kicking the bucket.” I don’t need to belabor that point. What I do feel called to do is to point out that when we go we leave a legacy. What is the legacy we wish to leave? As miserly? Or generous?

Since what is considered generous can be subjective, let me point to an objective measure: the Biblical tithe, 10% of our income given to God. As some have heard me say before, it is a benchmark, a goal, one (but certainly not the only one) measure of our spiritual life; and the way we get there is to consider our gift as a proportion of our income. Yes, between our two churches—Mary Taylor Memorial and Hamden Plains—Carol and I tithe. We do it not to satisfy a religious legalism but as an expression of gratitude to the God who has given us everything for our enjoyment. We also do it because of the salvation we have received through God’s extravagant generosity on the Cross. We believe that by God’s sacrificial love we have been saved and risen to new life with God. Therefore, in the spirit of Colossians 3:1: *“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”* Each of us has to decide for ourselves how we respond to this. To me, to seek the things that are above means leaving a legacy to those who follow in the name of the One who came to save us all.

Which leaves us with the “bucket list:” things we’d like to do before we kick the bucket. The bad news is, it is highly unlikely that we will accomplish everything on that list. But the good news is that we have a vision and hope for the future, to accomplish some of those things while we are yet alive on the earth.

Let me suggest that one of the things on your bucket list can be this church and its future. Those present last week saw the current vitality of this church in its laity: Bill Katt’s winsome message about Christ’s command to love; our young people witnessing to their faith and challenging us to do better; Laura and

Jelani and their families commitment to baby Lily in baptism; inspiring and exuberant music; and the leadership of our Lay Leaders, Leigh Bak and Kelly O'Hara in pulling it all together. I can tell you that visitors constantly report to me the palpable energy of God's love and care in this place. My prayer is that, on each of our bucket lists, is a commitment to invest in the future of Mary Taylor Memorial, so that the vision of the prophet Joel might be our own: *"Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."*

You've seen what's in my bucket. What's in yours?

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- (1) Schnase, Robert, Extravagant Generosity: Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2011, p. 45
 - (2) ABC News, October 23, 2013
 - (3) Matthew 6:28b, 31a, 32b, 33