

SAFE DEPOSIT

Stewardship Sunday is generally associated with money, even though we realize stewardship applies to how we manage life, overall.

So as to not disappoint, the financial aspect will be a significant component of this message,...which in a way, is interesting in that the church pastor is doing this.

A survey of business people, done a few years ago, revealed that pastors are not high on the list of financial consultants. Business people were asked to list, by profession, the people they asked for financial advice.

Church pastors were just above the category of "no one."

Another survey found that only 9.4% of business people would consult a pastor when they were dealing with financial difficulties.

A Pastor's insight is rarely used Even When a person is in financial turmoil.

~~~~~

Truth be told, I know very little about financial investments or how to best expand one's financial portfolio. So, don't come to me for advice about how to save or make more money.

Yet, I do know a little bit about stewardship, and .....when the topic is money,..... it's hard to find someone else willing to speak.

~~~~~

Nevertheless, we do need to be reminded that there is more to economics than money, and to be sure, there is a spiritual side to this, too.

~~~~~

We've been conditioned when we hear the word "economy" to only think about the monetary side of it. Our national narrative is fixated on ways to make more money, using older, established methods. This makes the rich richer, and it ignores the overall cost of such endeavors, such as destruction, waste, displacement and the reduction of social unity and peace.

Also, the buzz word is commonly, "development", yet the word should be "expansion" Because, true development would invite innovation, including smaller markets, renewable energy and new alternative economic systems.

The "economy" is not just about money.

Still, money is important. We need money to do things, and to simply survive.

Right or wrong, money is a major factor in life, and therefore it is something that should not be wasted, especially when we believe there is a shortage of it.

~~~~~

We Mennonite have learned to be frugal people. We don't like to waste things. We don't like to waste money.

You've likely heard how copper wire was invented. ??

Copper wire was invented when two Mennonites picked up a penny at the same time. ~~~~~
~~~~~

It used to be that we Mennonites were associated with "simple living", but our affluence must have tainted us a little. A recent survey of American Mennonites showed that "simple living" ranked near the bottom of the list of values and identity.

???

Somehow, "simple living" transformed into frugality, and there's a big difference.

Simple living is using less.

Frugality is holding onto more.

~~~~~

So, what and why are we holding onto things and money?

I suppose we retain money and stuff because we feel we need it, and we believe there is a limited amount.

So the thinking: we better get and keep what we can, while we can.

Therefore, we try to make secure investments.

We want to own enough,.... which often translates into we want to own more..... because what is enough?

Yet, is this "holding on" / this investing prudent and secure?

Does it really make sense in the big picture?

~~~~~

Those questions got me thinking.

What do we really own? What do we actually possess or control?

What is safe and secure? What can we rely on that is ours?

What do we own?

To begin with: all of us will reluctantly agree that we can't own money. Even with government backed insurance, money can dissolve away. People lost half or more of their investments in 2008.

It just disappeared, and so may the rebound.

Sky rocketing inflation may return, which drains the value of money.

Plus, it can get stolen. Money is not very safe and secure.

~~~~~

There was a time when I thought I owned my name.

It was mine alone. Then came Google, and I discovered another Gordon Allaby living in New Brunswick.

A name is merely a label.

I own my Honda..... well it's not totally safe. It can be destroyed or taken away. There's no guarantee with a car.

These days, people are having their identity stolen, that is: their "official", documented identity.

Copyrights can be stolen, too, as with personal possessions.
Most people don't own their house, the bank does.
And, if you don't have mortgage, then you have a better claim, yet still vulnerable. Real estate has it risks, such as disasters or eminent domain.

We certainly do NOT own our children, and anyone who thinks they own their partner has a warped, even destructive understanding of marriage.

And unfortunately, we don't even own our own body.
Our body can be moved / taken without our consent, and we don't even own the parts.
After my kidney was removed, I felt rather sad about it, there was some grief. So, I asked if I could have it back.
I thought it was mine, after all. I'd keep in a jar or something.
But instead, I received a strange look and told, "No I can't have it."

~~~~~  
I think I made my point about the security in what we think we own or control.

For the most part, stuff that we claim to own is just close by / under our temporary influence.

Apparently, the Russians figured that out a long time ago... because in the Russian language, there is no way to say "I own this or that."  
Instead, the phrase is "*it by me*", such as the car is by me.  
{ write in Russian here }.

All this to say: we own very little; therefore, we may want to review our "investments" and what we value.  
Basically, we own our actions / our behaviour / how we respond, and we own our emotions.

Moreover, according to the Bible, all things are God's, and we are simply custodians / stewards of what God has created.

All things are God's, and money is called currency because it eases the exchange of things. All things are God's.  
We are caretakers in the flow, or at least that is how it's suppose to work.

~~~~~  
Things and money come into our sphere of influence, and so we must decide what to do with them.

If we remove God from the picture, then we tend to believe that we can earn and own stuff,..... **and** we fear that the flow to us may end.
Therefore, we try to get while we can and hold onto as much as we can, because we fear that there is a limited amount.

~~~~~  
This "Erasing God from the picture" perspective is why it can be painful and difficult to give things away.  
Giving to charity or to others will feel like a sacrifice, unless we can make it an investment.

Often, donations are investments: a certain outcome is demanded, and part of the payback includes feeling good about being so generous.

That's why charitable organizations praise and honour donors.

It's part of the payback for their investment.

~~~~~

That way of thinking arises from the belief of personal ownership, the fear of depravity and the desire to control.

God is mostly missing in that picture,..... and those who think that way are missing something, too.

~~~~~

In the Matthew text, Jesus reminds us about the futility in thinking that we can be secure in holding onto things and investing in money.

Jesus stresses that what we treasure is where our heart is.

What we invest in is where our life and soul resides.

Does it reside in the picture with God or not?

According to Jesus, it can't be in both places.

~~~~~

~~~~~

Realizing that all things are God's and that there is bounty and surplus in God's economy frees us from fear and the burden of running out.

As the Psalm passage shares, there is joy and thankfulness in acknowledging that all is God's.

God creates all things, and I don't think God has stopped creating.

Moreover, God is gracious and generous, too.

Money / things come our way, and as stewards we are commissioned to care for what is God's,....AND to NOT hinder the flow.

We receive and we give.

We are stewards in this current with currency.

~~~~~

Some people are fortunate to have more money flow their way, and that's okay as long as the flow is not blocked.

The affluent have the opportunity to give more, and that's fine.

When the flow is blocked or reduced, then others waiting downstream are hurt.

It is simple logic: when the rich get richer, the poor get poorer.

Yet, there is the spiritual element to this, too, and this divine system does not suggest that we should be careless and reckless with things.

We are custodians / stewards of God's creation, and the means being responsible.

Throwing money away is not being responsible, nor is hoarding it.

God's system includes God.

We give as we are called by God to give, and we receive with thankfulness, too.
Giving to the church is a way of giving to God. It is a response to the question, "What percentage is God asking me to give."

Nevertheless, this message is not just about money.
It is Not just about giving to the church.

The church will be just fine.
The church will do with what come in. The church is in God's divine system. What comes in goes out.
We don't save because we fear a shortage.
The church will keep doing ministries, no matter what, because we are not here for our own sake.
We do not exist for the sake of our existence.

The church is the body of Christ, and the church will carry on, even if our shape and appearance changes.
The church will be just fine.

The passages today are about the condition of one's soul / one's spirit.

We are invited to live in joy and delight--to be free of fear and the burden of ownership.

We are invited to invest in God's domain / in God's system.
That realm is love, and love grows when it is given away.
Love withers and dies when locked away and protected.

This is a call to be free and to be stewards and let God take care of tomorrow.

~~~~~

This is also an invitation to live in the truth that we really can't control tomorrow. It really is faith in God.....or the myth of ownership.  
And, we must trust that people upstream are not damming the flow.