

The Money of Our Soul
A sermon by Rev. Frieda Gillespie
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There is no better place to go to for wisdom about money than the Bible. There is something for everyone there. If you believe you should enjoy abundance and wealth you'll find that declared, if you believe you should give up all wealth and live a spiritual life of poverty, you'll find that too. If you believe money comes as a reward from God for doing God's will, you'll definitely find that. The old misquoted adage is there, "the love of money is the root of all evil." And if you look a little harder, you'll find wisdom that says wealth is something you find inside you rather than in material things. All of these varied and sometimes contradictory messages and more are to be found in the Bible.

My favorite passage about money is attributed to Jesus in each of the Gospels. Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

This is the sermon where I am supposed to convince you to give money to this church. I don't know you well enough yet, frankly, to know what your attitudes are about money. I have observed that you love this church, that you care for it, and each other. I haven't heard anyone here say, "We don't like to talk about money and we've heard it all before," but you may be feeling that way. And, I'm sure that's true and my response is that I'm not certain you should give money to this congregation.

If we accept Jesus' principle that where your treasure is there your heart will be also, then I think your money should be very, very carefully placed. Money is a form of energy. Its meaning in our society is much more than utilitarian. How we earn our money and what we do with it can be a spiritual practice of a kind. At least it matters to our spiritual well-being how we earn our money and what we do with it. Giving our efforts to any endeavor is a sacred action. We have only so many years to live on this Earth, what we spend that time doing matters to us. It matters now and it will matter at the end of our lives when we look back and ask if it has all been worthwhile.

Our hearts go out in many directions some of them good for us and others not so good. Some of our hearts' desires are based in reality and others are largely fantasy. So we may not always be doing ourselves any favors by putting our money where our hearts are. We are bombarded by advertisements and seeing the possessions of other people urging us to spend, spend, spend in so many ways. We receive dozens of requests for donations from charities most of which are very worthy. It is no wonder that we get defensive about giving. Why should we give in to demands, manipulations and coercions?

So it seems to me Jesus is suggesting that we should think about where to put our treasure because once we put it there, our hearts will follow. I think we can all relate to the idea that when we invest our money or our time somewhere we begin to care more deeply about it. Whether it is our home, our car, our community or our church, where we invest ourselves becomes the place we love. If we don't love it, it becomes a tremendous burden that we resent.

So I will urge you to consider not just the needs that come knocking on your door, but your own inner calling.

Peter Gomes preacher to Harvard University and theologian talked about the concept of wealth in the New Testament. "Wealth," he said,

“is not what you have; wealth is what you have been given that enables you to give to others.” Sometimes we focus so much on what we don’t have, we fail to realize how incredibly wealthy and fortunate we are. There are people living in deep poverty in this country, but all of us here in this room, are incredibly wealthy compared to the vast majority of people in this world. If you have the promise of a decent roof over your head, clothing appropriate to your work and life, and food to eat every day you have the basic security of wealth. Many of us, if not most of us, have much more than that. We may have health insurance; we may have relatives and friends that can help us out if we are in need. No greater amount of money can give you more security than having these basic needs met.

Acknowledging that we have wealth no matter what the size of it these days, generates a feeling of gratitude. Does this gratitude call for a response from us? You must each answer that for yourself. I believe it does. I believe it calls for each of us to give back in whatever way we can as our conscience dictates.

I have to tell you though it is an endless cycle. Because giving always, always, always generates more for you to receive—more to be grateful for. Not indiscriminant giving, but giving in just the right place to put our hearts.

It seems to be common wisdom among ministers that those with the least money tend to give a greater percentage of their money to their church. Perhaps they know the secret of giving, that it brings joy, activity, and a sense of purpose. And perhaps they know how much just a little more can do for someone.

We Unitarian Universalists are not only gifted with wealth, but we are also blessed with a faith that is like no other. Rev. John Buehrens says, “Most religious groups ask the question, “What do we all believe in common?” That is a creedal question. The question we ask instead is a

covenantal question, “What are we willing to promise to one another and to the world?” Shall we promise to keep this congregation alive through thick and thin? To help each other through hard times? Shall we promise to keep a forward-looking vision toward growth of all kinds, spiritual, physical and financial? Shall we promise to engage fully wherever we give our hard-earned money?

In her book, *The Soul of Money*, Lynn Twist shares a metaphor of the caterpillar and the butterfly. The world we live in is likened to the voracious, glutinous all-consuming caterpillar. Humans striving all over the world to take as much as they can get, using, devouring whatever serves their purpose. But within the caterpillar are some specialized cells called ‘imaginal’ cells. These cells are in the minority but when they find each other they become the genetic directors of the whole creature. They are the ones that cause the caterpillar to transform itself into the butterfly. The overstuffed body of the caterpillar becomes the nutrient soup the imaginal cells use to create the next stage of life. Twist writes, “When I look at the inspired, devoted and brilliant people at work in so many ways to repair and nourish the world, in families, in communities, and sustainable enterprises everywhere on Earth, I see the imaginal cells of our own transformation.”

What we do here and who we are is part of this healing, transformational work. If money is the conduit from which all things flow between human beings, Twist challenges her readers to “use your money, every dollar, every penny, every purchase, every stock and every bond, to voice this transformation.” She says, “I challenge you to move the resources that flow through your life toward your highest commitments and ideals, those things you stand for. I challenge you to hold money as a common trust that we’re all responsible for using in ways that nurture and empower us, and all life, our planet, and all future generations.”

So we come back to this question of what you should give to this congregation. I can't answer that for you. But I can say, if giving to this church and putting your money where your faith is, gives you new life; gives you joy and a sense of purpose, I can't think of any better place for it to be. Do not be merely a visitor here, life is too short. I am not speaking to those of you who are very new here, but to those who've been coming long enough to know what this means to them. Find the place or places to put your money, your time and your effort where your heart will get the greatest possible care and satisfaction. If this is such a place for you then simply give until you feel it—not pain, but the joy, energy and vitality that comes from investing in the unfolding of your heart. You'll know just how much. We will know it by your words but also we see it in your face and in the way you care about this church. And it will be enough.