

Money Myths 2. It is unpleasant to give

2 Corinthians 8:1-7 & Mark 14:3-9

A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a fifty pence piece and a pound coin for church. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the pound coin, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the fifty pence piece, so I did."

Some say it's unpleasant to give. Many think we would be happier if we kept our money for ourselves. It makes sense, doesn't it? Life is hard enough without giving away your hard earned cash. After all, nobody knows

what is around the next corner and there may come a time when we really need that money: all of it! And so isn't it prudent to save and save and save so that we might find security? And so the argument goes on. There is a rather unsettling problem with this life view for the Christian. It just doesn't sit very well with the Gospel story. We don't find encouragement to hoard! Quite the opposite, we regularly read of warnings not to hoard or to store up your wealth on earth. As a wee boy I was fascinated by the story of the discovery of Tutenkamon's burial chamber in Egypt. I was amazed at the splendour of the gold coffin and the collection of prized possessions that had been placed with the body in preparation for the journey into the next life. The expectation really was that the dead will take their prestige and their wealth with them: that material prosperity really does count and is transferable from

one world to the next. Jesus emphatically declared that it is not the case.

John G. Wendel and his sisters were some of the most miserly people of all time. Although they had received a huge inheritance from their parents, they spent very little of it and did all they could to keep their wealth for themselves. John was able to influence five of his six sisters never to marry, and they lived in the same house in New York City for 50 years. When the last sister died in 1931, her estate was valued at more than \$100 million. Her only dress was one that she had made herself, and she had worn it for 25 years.

The Wendels had such a compulsion to hold on to their wealth that they lived like paupers and they lived in misery. It's an extreme illustration but it brings out a truth that we need to take heed of. If we look to money as a source of comfort and joy, it will continually

burden us and deprive us of the joy that we so earnestly desire. If we learn to open our hearts and respond with generous giving we will find joy. There is great joy in giving. It is said of the Macedonians that they gave with "the abundance of their joy." Jesus challenged the myth that it is unpleasant to give. He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Think about that at Christmas time. When you and your family are all around the tree opening gifts, what do you do? Do you watch the one who is opening the gift? Of course, but what about the expression on the giver's face, which is filled with delight upon seeing the recipient enjoying the gift. It is written all across the giver's face! This is why parents like Christmas so much. Because it is fun to give! The only reason some of us have not found the "abundance of joy" in giving is because we simply have not practiced it. It is a myth to say that it is unpleasant

to give. Those who know what it is to have an open hand with God have joy.

We remember the story of woman in Bethany who came to Jesus and gave abundantly and in so doing received his blessing. Jesus said of the woman in Bethany that she had done "a beautiful thing to Him." But note the reaction of those present who could not see beyond the apparent waste of the expensive ointment. "A few drops of her ointment would have been more than adequate to express her respect, but she pours the whole lot over him." But that's the point. A few drops of the perfume would not have been enough for that woman. It had to be the lot, or nothing. It had to be the lot, or her joy would be incomplete. She knew what she had to do and a group of men who were effectively policing access to Jesus were not going to stand in her way. We don't have the same barriers in our way that

she encountered and yet we may find excuses that take us away.

C.S. Lewis once wrote; “Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” We settle for a relative poverty in our so called riches when the offer is infinite joy. Why live our lives short of what God intends for us when his desire is that we experience that abundance of joy now in the present. “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.”

The outpouring of love and devotion displayed by the woman was an act of sacrificial giving, something that

can be difficult for us to comprehend as we often think in terms of economy of time, money and resources. The remarkable Gospel story is essentially counter-cultural in the sense that it turns upside down the assumed wisdom of the ages and presents us with a radically different way. Stewardship is a way of life that calls believers in Christ to receive God's gifts with gratitude and to cultivate these gifts responsibly and to share them sacrificially and to return these gifts with increase to God. The Macedonians gave out of an "abundance of joy." It is a myth to say that only people with money should give, and it is an equal myth to say that it is unpleasant to give. Augustine, the early Church father wrote: "Where your pleasure is, there is your treasure; where your treasure is, there is your heart; where your heart is, there is your happiness." May we all recognise the truth of those words this

morning and receive the joy that comes with abundant giving.