

No, this is not a misprint – it’s not the “Sermon on the Mount” – where Jesus talked about ‘blessed are the meek, and those who mourn...you are the salt of the earth...don’t be anxious about tomorrow”.

No, this is a sermon on the amount!

Now this title is not original with me – most people think it was first used by the late Ernest Campbell, the great preacher at Riverside Church in New York City back in the early seventies.

But it catches our attention, and the truth of the matter is that it jumps out at many of us because we do tend to focus on the amount – we want vital programs, we want to make a difference, we want to meet the needs of families and friends and those in need through the ministries and mission of this great church.

So, let’s deal with that right from the beginning – let me give you some ‘amounts’, some numbers about what we are doing.

As you saw last week, we have 14 young people in our Confirmation Class; we will be receiving 17 new members into our church this afternoon and introducing them next week.

Our Weekday School has 114 students, almost to capacity. Our Youth Group no longer meets as one group, but because of the amount of youth has been divided into Middle School and Senior High youth groups for Sunday night programs.

Do you know how many people come through the doors of First Presbyterian Church each week?

I asked Roger Burbage, our Church Administrator, to look at the people using our facilities, how many?

Depending on the season of the year, somewhere between 2,500 and 3,000 people come through the doors of this church every week!

And there’s no way to figure the amount of people helped by what goes out these doors – Project Safe, Daily Bread, Jubilee Partners, our Mission Trips to Honduras, Haiti, Door in Atlanta, our grants to community organizations, throughout the world by our support of Presbyterian missions – an untold number of people outside the doors of First Presbyterian Church!

This week you’ll receive a letter and brochure that gives you an amount that we project as needed to fund all we want to do in “Bearing Fruit” in 2018.

But if you’re expecting me to give you an amount that you need to give to make it all happen, I would love to do that; but I can’t.

I think of the teenager going to his father on Friday afternoon, “Dad, could you give me \$50 for the weekend?”

And Dad responds, “\$40? Why do you need 30?”

I can’t tell you the exact amount to give that’s your choice; but what I know from what the Bible teaches, I can tell you that it should have the word generous in front of it!

Look back at our Gospel lesson – we are very familiar with Jesus’ parable of the sower, but it’s the passage before that in Luke’s gospel that I want to call to your attention.

Jesus is going about the countryside doing what Jesus does, and Luke gives us a list of the people with him – of course, there are the disciples, but then he calls out by name these women, but what caught me was that last line.

They provided for Jesus's ministry out of their resources – Luke actually names names for the stewardship list!

Then he has this story of Jesus' parable of the sower and the seeds. What I think Luke is doing is saying here's how Jesus ministry got funded.

And here is Jesus' sermon on the amount – all the seeds sown on the ground – and he wants his gospel listeners to think about, to pray about, to make their commitment to provide the resources for the seeds to be planted that will grow the church that is hearing this gospel from Luke.

Paul uses this imagery from Jesus' story – to sow the seeds, to give from your resources so Jesus can go about doing what Jesus is supposed to do.

He is telling the Christians in Corinth – you have a choice, you make up your mind as to the amount you give to support the mission of the church.

First of all - the offering we give is a matter of choice. Paul tells us that God is seeking a willing response - when the heart, our passion, and the head, our intelligence, has caught the power of providing for God's glory and goodness.

The result of it all, as Paul describes it, should bring great joy to the one who gives. I'm sure you've always heard that you should give until it hurts - but that's not biblical - the biblical understanding of the offering, is that you make a choice to give until it feels good.

Second, our choice about giving is a matter of character. Paul talks of those with a generous heart - Jesus said that where your heart is, there your treasure will be.

I remember a teenage boy, it was early February, very despondent, asked him what the problem was.

He had just broken up with his girlfriend, and he bemoans, "I gave her the best, (he counts on his fingers (Sept - Jan) 5 months of my life."

Come to find out, he had given her a very nice bottle of perfume for Christmas, and he said he had just bought a heart shaped locket he was going to give her for Valentine's.

And I suspect he was more upset about the money spent than the girlfriend lost, because the Sunday after Valentine's, he was sitting with another girl who happened to be wearing a pretty heart-shaped locket.

Heart and treasure are always connected, and when we are confronted with a choice about what we give, there are basically three heart conditions that lead us to choosing an amount.

There is the miserly heart - very utilitarian, very practical - it asks why churches have to have big buildings when there are so many homeless; why do we have to send people to Honduras, just give the money to be used to help those less fortunate.

This miserly heart condition forgets that we don't live by bread alone - there is a spiritual dimension that inspires and encourages, that the columns of this church are a visible reminder of who we are, whose we are - and that fellowship is crucial for the work of the kingdom.

In your character and mine, there should be a sense of what is beautiful and good that overcomes the miserly heart.

And we struggle with what I call the condition of the market heart...

So much of our living is judged by the market heart that measures the amount on the bottom line. Jesus warned us about it: *What shall it profit you if you gain the world and lose your soul?*

The market heart condition looks at education in terms of increased income that come with more degrees or particular schools.

The market heart looks at home life and focuses more on the cost of living than the purpose of living.

Some join a church, with a market heart that seeks to make professional and business contacts or has an imagined status about it. Looking for the bottom line!

In the church, there is the reality of the miserly heart and the market heart, but thank God, there is also, (and I went to my thesaurus for this third 'm') - there is also the munificent heart.

Those with 'generous hearts' - munificence, according to the dictionary means "liberal in giving, lavish, great liberality of generosity" - exactly the people Paul is talking about -the kind of people who reflect the mind of God - the people of the generous heart are people like you and me who belong to a munificent God.

Our generosity is shaped by the generosity of God who has given us the gift of life, the realities of hope, the love of family, the care of friends.

There is a spiritual math involved here, but it uses real numbers of our real lives with our real resources.

I knew a young man, a very successful businessman who had a nearly fatal heart attack.

One day after his recovery he came by my office. He pulled out his checkbook to make a contribution to our special missions fund.

I told him I didn't want to see it - what he was giving.

He said, "I'm not filling out the amount; I'll do that when I give it to the business manager. I just want to show you what I've learned.

See that line down there where it says 'for' - every time now that I write a check to the church, I write down on that line what I need to always remember, and then he wrote out, "Thank God."

He had learned something that we all need to learn.

The amount we give to God comes after we remember to thank God – after we add up the amount of our commitment and the amount of our joy to give 100% of ourselves - that's the spiritual math that will give you an amount.

It is because of the generosity of God that this church has done all the great things it has accomplished, is doing great things now, and will be doing great things in the future.

All that is done here is for God, and it is provided for by a generous and joyous response of God's people - a choice that reveals the character of the members of this church.

Without apology, I ask you to give to the mission and ministries of First Presbyterian Church - Jesus spoke of the blessings in his sermon on the mount - so I close this sermon on the amount by simply asking you to prayerfully consider the amount you give because God has blessed you to be a blessing!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.