

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Luke Looks at Money: What about the Rest?”
Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Deuteronomy 16:13-17, Luke 10:30-37

I was having a weekly breakfast with one of our members one morning at the Avenue down on Woodward. Usually when we meet there are few people close to us. But on this particular morning in the booth behind me were two men I didn't know. I wouldn't have noticed except the voice of one of the men began to dramatically increase in volume and anger. “Who the “fill-in-the-blank” do these robin hood people think that they are stealing my money and giving it to the poor. They have no right to that. It's my money and they have no right to it.” I did my best to then tune out the words so I could pay attention to the person I was with, and so I couldn't tell you exactly what he said, but I can tell you how he said it, and it was in a voice filled with resentment and vitriol. As I walked past him on my way out of the restaurant my imaginary inclination, meaning those things I imagine myself doing but will never do, was to slide in next to him and tell him all of the reasons that it is good for some robin hood someplace to be helping the poor. After all I am a pastor and that is what we pastors are supposed to do.

As the day went on though I began to think more deeply about it. And I too asked myself, who are those robin hoods who take our money? What right do they have to take the money we work or worked so hard for? Having been here for a little over six years I have come to appreciate the work ethic you all share. You fly all over the world to take care of business. You are constantly away from families and friends. You work long hours to insure that the company, or your company remains solvent. You often work at jobs you do not like or that stress you to the max. For those of you in the auto industry, you have weathered the trials that it has brought. So who was I to lecture that man sitting the booth behind me? For all I know he had sacrificed his health, his home and his family to gain whatever wealth he had. And besides, how many of us really like paying our taxes? How many of us can say with certainty that we agree with everything that the government does with our taxes? Those thoughts led me to change what my imaginary self would have said to the man in the booth behind me.

I would have asked him this question, “What do you do with the rest of it?” For that is the question, because we all pay taxes but we also all have something left over. And so this is where our story begins to overlap with the Biblical story. Many of you probably know the story Luke tells but I want to be sure that we are all on board, so here we go. And for full disclosure, there was no real Good Samaritan; this is a story Jesus tells, yet as he tells it, people understand the entire context in which it was told. So once upon a time there was a Jewish small business man who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked, beaten, robbed and left for dead. Several good Jewish religious leaders walked by and none of them did anything. Finally a Samaritan came by and cared for the man. This is unusual because Samaritans and Jews were enemies. Traditionally the moral of the story is that all people, including our enemies, are our neighbors and so we are to be nice to everyone. The end. What I want to do this morning is to offer a different take on this story. I want us to see this is a broader context that

reminds us that, as with so many other stories, this story is about money. I say that because money takes central stage in the story.

Let's return to the Samaritan. Everyone listening to Jesus would have understood who he was. First, he was a small business man. There would have been no other reason for him to have a donkey and to be travelling the very dangerous road on which the story takes place. As a small business man, Jesus' audience would have also known that he was heavily taxed by the Romans. They would have taxed what he bought, what he sold and on what he transported from town to town. What this means is that he is not a wealthy man, but was instead someone who worked hard, took risks and so truly earned his money. Second, as a small business man, time was money. He needed to get to his destination to sell his goods and make a profit. Third, they would have understood that his goods for sale were his wine and oil. Finally, they would have understood that Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies. What happens when the Samaritan sees the beaten man is remarkable. The Samaritan stops and tends to him. He tends to him by giving up some of this inventory of wine and oil with which to treat the man's wounds. Then he takes some of his own clothing, tears it and uses it as bandages. Next he proceeds to carry the man on this own donkey to a local inn...remember time is money. The Samaritan is wasting his time and risking his business. Once at the inn the Samaritan makes a generous payment to the inn for the welfare of the stranger. Finally the Samaritan does the most amazing thing of all. He issues a promissory note for the care of a man he does not know. He will pay all expenses. This is what the Samaritan does with "the rest" of what he has.

For Jesus then, loving neighbor was not simply about being nice to someone whom we might consider to be our enemy. It was about demonstrating this neighborliness with loving actions and cold, hard cash. It was about doing something. This, Jesus says, is what God followers are to do with "the rest." It is this realization that allows us as a Jesus community to do giving things. I know this because of you it is possible for FAR to see over 1100 clients every year. I know this because you give more than 2000 tutoring hours and more than 2,400 meals a year to families at Alcott Elementary School in Pontiac. I know this because through the Ruth Ellis Center we are helping to feed LGBT youth who have been kicked out of their homes. I know this because people are volunteering to build a school and a church in Kenya. I know this because of our mission trips to Mexico. I know this because you volunteer with our All Abilities Inclusion Ministry. I know this because you provide for a satellite office for the Samaritan Counseling Center. I know this because you support the vision that God has given us to be Everybody's Church.

All of us have "the rest." All of us have something that we can offer to God and neighbor as a way of living the call to love given to us by Jesus. The challenge then is this, as you prepare to make your financial commitment to First Presbyterian Church, ask yourself what would God have me do with "the rest" of what I have to and through Everybody's Church?