**25 OT-C1 Money-Money-Money!**

A couple weeks ago I preached that a disciple is an intentional lover of Jesus, and this intentionality looks like stewardship. Today I am going to say a word about MONEY.

Ooooo, can't you just fill the tension swell in this place! Just the mention of money in church causes alarms to go off in our consumer minds.

I believe the reason money is such a taboo topic for most of us is because given the consumer mindset with which our society raises us, money is at the center of our world. Money is how the consumer exercises power over his or her environment.

I remember my first counter with the intoxicating power of money. I was just a little boy. My family was going on a vacation to the Rocky Mountains. We had a big station wagon then one we could all pile into for trips. I remember distinctly somehow saving up $30.00 for the trip. I'd gone to the bank behind our house and gotten 30 crisp brand-new dollar bills. As I sat in the back of the station wagon, just behind my mom next to the window, I counted my $30 over and over and over again. I remember walking through gift shops in the Rocky Mountains trying to decide if I should spend any of my fortune on the wonderful stuff I saw like coconut monkey heads, or coonskin hats, or wooden rubber band guns. My problem was I didn't want to let go of the power I felt holding my 30 crisp new dollar bills. Ultimately, I resolved my inner conflict and bought my first ever leather wallet, “Rocky Mountain State Park” burned into its side.

The power of money is intoxicating to us consumers, no wonder our alarms go off whenever someone wants to talk about it in church.

And if this was not enough of a problem, our scripture today just adds to the angst. The prophet Amos slams a crook while Jesus seems to praise one. What is going on with today’s Gospel steward?

This steward is a crook, a thief. There's nothing that distinguishes him from all the world's other crooks as described by the prophet Amos. And for the master to call him a “good steward” offends everyone trying to live a good life. How can Jesus compare this guy to one of us? What could Jesus possibly see in this guy that he wants to hold up as an example to his disciples?

Then it hit me, I know what Jesus sees. The dishonest steward realizes that everything is going to be revealed in the light. He realizes everything he has really belongs to his master. And he, realizing this, methodically begins to use it accordingly.

I once read a report put out by the University of Notre Dame’s Institute for Church Life entitled, “Steps in the Journey to Becoming a More Generous Person.” The report demonstrated that the two most decisive factors in promoting financial generosity are (1) purposely deciding to give away more money and (2) adopting habitual systematic practices of giving.

Both of these things our Gospel guy does! Realizing everything he has really belongs to his master, he purposefully decides to give away more and does it in a systematic way. I think the steward’s intentionality is why Jesus holds him up as an example.

Many of us, I believe, already realize that all we have (wealth, intelligence, skills, health, relationships) really belong to God. Most of us realize that we are stewards of God's gifts, not owners.

Yet when it comes to my “thirty crisp one-dollar bills,” given the consumerist environment within which *I live and breathe and have my being*, bringing any intentionality or systematic means of sharing them feels unnatural. It feels more natural to give spontaneously or to give whatever I feel I can afford at any given moment in time.

Why does it matter? Why does Jesus hold up intentionality and habitual practices to us as desirable attributes of a disciple?

I think it is because when I with forethought give away some of my “thirty crisp new dollar bills” it is an act of trust in God and God's reliability. Stewardship is an act of faith.

Taking leaps of faith with our money is just about the scariest thing in the world we can imagine. We like the feel of our ‘thirty crisp new dollar bills” in our hands.

But as serious followers of Jesus Christ we have grown to like something else just a bit more, honoring our friend Jesus and trusting him.

So, bring intentionality to our giving and some systematic way to do it, not after we know we are taken care of but on the front end, when the offering requires more trust on our part.

May Jesus find in us examples he can proudly hold up to others.