Sunday, November 10, 1974
SHOW ME!
Mark 12:41-44; II Corinthians 9:6-8; I Corinthians 15:58-16:1

As you can see from the scripture lessons just read and printed on your order of service, the Bible often speaks plainly about money and the church. In fact, the Bible gives explicit advice and direction as to how and when we are to support the work of the church with our money.

The Apostle Paul, as he wrote to the church in Corinth, talked first about some spiritual principles and some of the promises of the faith. Then he quite abruptly speaks to the church members about some very practical matters. He said, “And now about the collection...!” And then he went on to tell the members of the church how they were to give money for the church’s work.

Well, like the Apostle Paul, that’s what we are going to do this morning. I’m going to talk with you openly and frankly about the collection, about money, about you and your money, and about the money needed for this church.

Incidentally, did you know that in the Bible, Jesus talks more about money and our use of it than he does about prayer?

Now., in talking about money and the church, we can all agree on some of the big general assumptions. We know that God created all things and that nothing really belongs to us. The fact that when we die, we can take nothing with us illustrates this more clearly than anything else we might say. All there is belongs in the final analysis to God the creator.

The second general assumption we can all agree on as Christians is that we are stewards or managers of what God entrusts to us. That’s how the Bible puts it. Thus, Jesus was always telling parables about servants or managers who were given charge to us. the property of the Master wisely, for Jesus said, “You will have to give account one day of 1what you did with what God gave you to manage.”

On these two general assumptions, most of us can agree. But we may also begin to squirm a little and say — “All right, that’s enough. Don’t go any further. Stick to the generalities. Don’t get any more specific and personal. Don’t meddle.”

We like those nice broad general statements which don’t call anything we are doing with our money into question.

Often too, we don’t want anyone to get too specific or personal about what we are doing with our money because we believe that what we give for the work of the church and how we use our money for other things is our own business and nobody else’s. But that’s not totally true.

We naturally try to hide the things we’re a bit sensitive about and then may try to defend it by saying “it’s really nobody else’s business. But it is the church’s business if you are giving way below your capability.

Sometimes we put too much of a premium on privacy in such matters. That may be one reason the crime rate is increasing so rapidly in our society. Too many people say that what

another person does is no one else's business and so we turn our heads and look the other way.

Some people even try to go so far as to say, "If I want to shoplift, if I want to steal a car, if I want to make a baby and not be responsible for it, if I want to push dope, that's my business and nobody else's. But we know that's not true and so we have police forces and courts of law and other kinds of procedures for calling each other to account because we know that what we do always affects other people for good or for ill. If I let garbage pile up around my house, then my neighbors have a right and a duty to take me to task, for my messiness affects the whole neighborhood.

There are some completely private areas of life but actually not very many. And particularly when we move into the area of morality, what my neighbor does is indeed my business and your business, and what I do is your business. After all, we are our brother's and sister's keeper, otherwise being a family of God has no meaning at all. Thus, in the Christian family, which is the church, we not only have the right but the duty to all each other's values into question and that may include how give money for the church.

Certainly then, a Christian can say to another Christian, speaking in love, "I think you ought to consider giving more money for the work of the church." He could even go on to say, "Look, I know about what your income is, and you are only giving $120 per year to the church. I think you ought to consider giving $1000 per year at least."

So also, in a service like this today I am not embarrassed to talk with you quite frankly· and openly about money and the money we need for the work of the church. So now let's get more specific and do a little bit of meddling.

Tomorrow each member of First-Plymouth church should receive in the mail h.is or her pledge card or the family pledge card. The Finance Committee of the church is asking that sometime this week you have a kind of family conference or a talk with yourself about what you are going to pledge for the work of the church for 1975. Then fill out the pledge card and bring it with you to the church service next Sunday morning.

Now when you are having that family conference or husband and wife talk or just thinking about your pledge all by yourself, here are some things to consider very specifically as you decide how much you are going to pledge for 1975.

1. First, don't average! Some persons make the mistake of looking at the total amount of the church budget and then figure out how many members there are and try to figure from that what their pledge should be. But that's not the Biblical way of giving for the work of the church. Some people can only give $200 per year while others can give $2000 and should.

2. Second, our overall church budget for 1975, is about 12% higher than 1974. An easy way out for some would be to simply raise their pledge by 12%, and I hope all of us will at least do that. But for some that won't be nearly enough. There are those within our membership who should double or triple their pledge or more. For example, if your income is $15,000 per year and you are presently pledging $100 per year to the church or about $2.00 per week, that is less than 1% of your income, and to merely increase your pledge by 12% or even %20 or even 100% is not enough. If, of course, your pledge is at the proper level, then a 12% increase would be quite fair.

But beyond this, what are some Christian guidelines for us to use in determining how much we should pledge toward the work of the church?

1. Begin your thinking by considering what 5% of your in-come would be as a pledge to the church. The Bible clearly says that Christian giving is to be systematic and on a proportionate or percentage basis. So, when you receive your pledge card tomorrow, sit down, and figure out what 5% of your income would be and then look at what you are now pledging to the church.

2. A second way to deterr11ine if your pledge is an adequate one is to look at what amount of money you spend for other things in your life. Make some brutal comparisons! For example, if you smoke cigarettes at the rate of about one pack a day, that's about 50¢ per day or about $3.50 per week, and about $182.00 per year. Now if your church pledge is only $2.00 per week or about $100 per year, then there's something drastically wrong in your value structure, unless you honestly believe that your smoking is more important than the work of the church.

Or calculate how much you and your family spend for entertainment during the year, or how much you spend on liquor and then compare those amounts with your church giving.

Incidentally, a news article not long ago noted tha.t in spited of inflation, the state's· receipts on cigarette tax money and liquor tax has been rising steadily this year, which means that in spite of people's complaints about having less money to spend because of inflation, Nebraska citizens continue to spend more on cigarettes and liquor.

And you can try some other comparisons. If, for example, you belong to the Country Club, how does your church giving compare with your annual dues to the Club plus your monthly charges? Where is the level of your church giving? How important is the church in your life and in your scale of values?

According to the Bible, our Christian giving is not to be the leftovers. We are to give substantial gifts, not simply what's left after we've taken care of everything else.

If we give on a less than substantial basis, we are really broadcasting to the world that Jesus Christ and the work of the church are not very important. We may be saying even that the work of the church is not as important as our smoking or· our entertainment, on our country club, or whatever else we're putting ahead of the church in our lives.

Much of the time when we say that we cannot afford to give more for the work of the church, what we really mean is that we are not accustomed to affording it. But you see with a little sustained effort we could get accustomed to it. New habits can be established. For some of us it might simply be cutting down on some of our luxuries.

There are basically three kinds of giving when it comes to the church. There is "sacrificial giving," when we really sacrifice something in our daily lives in order to support the work of the church. There is "inconvenience giving," when our giving causes us some inconvenience, but not really sacrifice. We may have to put off buying that new suit of clothes for six months or a year, or inconvenience ourselves in some other way. And there is "leftover" giving. If there's any money left over after we've taken care of all of what we think we need, then we give that for the work of the church. What kind of giving are you involved in?

The Bible puts it plainly. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Will you accept a challenge? Try real percentage giving for 1975. Pledge a certain percent of your income. At least begin your thinking by considering what a 5% pledge would be. Grow a little or a lot in your giving. Then take that percentage out of your income first and put it aside and don't let it be used for anything else. Make your commitment and then bring your offering for the work of the church in a cheerful and joyous fashion.

Let me be personal for a moment. I believe First-Plymouth Church is an important and vital institution in this community and in the United Church of Christ. We can be a just better than average church or we can be a truly great church. We have the potential and the capability. I furthermore believe the ministry which this congregation carries on is vitally needed in this community now more than ever. Do you believe that?

The title of this sermon is "Show Me!" and it comes from the words of a song in the musical "MY FAIR LADY." At one point in the musical, Eliza Doolittle, who has been working with words and hearing words and more words, finally says in frustration, "Words, Words, Words, I'm so sick of words, and then she goes on to sing," Don't talk of stars burning above; if you're in love, show me! "And she continues with that message.

Well, by now you're probably sick of words about money, and I'm tired of hearing myself talk. We've had enough words about money and the church. So, if you believe that the church needs to continue to move forward and expand its work, if you think the church is important in the world and in your life, and if you want it to be more important, then let's all do more than talk about it with words. If you love the church, "Show me!"