Sunday November 9, 1980

"BUILDING ON 50" Matthew 25:14-30

A man called his servants and gave them sums of money in trust, and went away. Later he returned and called them to account. Two of them had not been afraid to use and risk what had been given them and were commended. The third confessed that he had been afraid to use and risk his master's money and had carefully hoarded it. He was not commended for his caution, but rather condemned.

The message of this story is that we are to be bold in living our faith. Do not be afraid to take risks. We are to use what has been given to us. "Use it or lose it!"

There is no reward for "playing it safe" for it indicates a lack of trust. The story implies that if the third servant had said, "I risked what you gave me and lost it," the master would not have been upset. "It is better to attempt to do something great and fail, than attempt to do nothing and succeed."

What rules your life? Fear of failing? Fear of tomorrow? Fear of doing the wrong thing and therefore doing nothing at all? That's one way to avoid making any mistakes, but that may be the greatest mistake of all--doing nothing, having no trust in God.

Have you ever noticed that the most unhappy people are those who are always afraid to try anything. They are the ones who say, "I'm bored. I'm not content with my life the way it is going. I'm really not very joyful or peaceful, but I just don't know how things can be different. I guess I have to be realistic and accept life as it is."

Such individuals are "what if" people." The third servant in the parable was a "what if" person. He no doubt said to himself, "What if I risk the money given to me and lose it?" "What if I make a mistake?" "What if the master comes back before he's supposed to?" He was enslaved to his pre-occupations. To be pre-occupied means to fill our time and place long before we are there--to occupy it in advance. We are filled with "if's." Thus some parents say to themselves, "What if my child is not home on time?" "What if there is not enough food tomorrow?" "What if I am attacked when I go out at night?" "What if

I have an accident?" "What if a war starts?" "What if the world comes to an end?" "What if I make a pledge to the church and lose my job?"

"What if people" fill their minds with anxious thoughts and they wonder constantly what to do or what to say. Much suffering is connected with being overly pre-occupied. Possible job changes, possible family conflicts, possible illnesses, possible trouble in the future, make us anxious, fearful, suspicious, greedy, stingy and nervous. Have you noticed that "What if people" rarely are anxious about the good things that will happen to them in the future.

"What if people" are immobilized. They are afraid to step out of the house for fear of something bad happening to them. They are afraid to give much money to the church for fear they won't have enough to live on.

Jesus knew about the "what if persons." That's why he said in many different ways, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own troubles be sufficient for the day. Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and everything else will fall into its proper place." As Christians we are not to be "what if" persons.

Jesus urges us to be bold, to take risks in the name of Christ with what God has given us.

Today on "pledge Sunday" we have the opportunity to make this very specific. Later on each one of us will be given the opportunity to pledge a certain amount of money for the work of the church. It will be a commitment of faith and trust. We will have the opportunity to put our money where our mouth is. By making a significant pledge for the work of the church, we are saying out loud to God, "This is how I am investing some of what you have given me."

I'm told that in banking terminology, the words, "dead money" are used to describe the forgotten money on deposit in banks. We would think that people who deposit money would remember it, but that is not always the case. Someone recently told me that National Banks alone hold more than 50 million dollars in accounts whose owners are never heard from.

According to the Christian faith, there is another kind of dead money; that which is never invested in human life. When we try to hold on to what we've got and only spend it for ourselves, then we are like the third servant in the parable--afraid to risk so that our money can be changed into life.

We are all the benefactors of people who were not afraid to take risks. It was risk that built this congregation and this building. In preparation for our 50th anniversary celebration of this building in April 1981, I've been reading a lot of the material we have in our archives which tells the story of how this magnificent building was built. Believe me, it was a risk, an act of faith on the part of our members when they decided to go ahead with their building plans following the crash of 1929. They could've decided not to go ahead with their plans.

The result is this building which is now a gift to us and to this entire community. It has been entrusted to us just as the master in the parable gave the talents to the three servants. It's up to us to make use of the building. Thus the theme of the Every-Member Canvass today is--"BUILDING ON 50." It's also up to us to take risks with our money so that this church can continue to carry on the vital programs in and through this building. Use it or lose it!

This morning then, I'm challenging each one of you to take a risk--to make a pledge higher than you pledged last year. Do not be a "what if" person, but rather a bold Christian.

2. The second point is this: When you give your money to the church, we take that money and change it into life. It is no longer dead money, but brings life to many.

Last week in the First-Plymouth Herald, you read how some of the youth in our church collected money for UNICEF and turned it into life. $80 will deliver enough high protein food to feed 240 malnourished children for a month, or buy 124 wood-working chisels so that so that youngsters can begin learning carpentry, or protect 5000 children against tuberculosis, or provide enough Vitamin A Capsules to protect 2000 toddlers from nutritionally-caused blindness.

In a similar fashion the church takes your money and turns it into life.

A boy was flying his kite, and he succeeded in flying it so high that it was out of sight. A woman passing by asked what he was doing standing there holding a piece of string. "I'm flying my kite," said the boy. "That can't be," said the woman, "I can't see any kite." "Neither can I," said the boy, "but I know it's there because I can feel the pull of it."

That's how many people in this church think of the whole process and experience we call Christian Education. Every week, time is shared with children and young people and adults in groups and classes. Members of this church work hard to prepare for these experiences, not simply because they love children or young people or adults, but also because they want others to "feel the pull," to sense that mysterious Other which upholds and guides this universe; to reach conclusions for themselves about the meaning and significance of life; to know about and feel the power, strength and love of God for all people. In this church money is being changed into life and into changed lives.

Through the years, there are many people who have come into this church and parted with their hard-earned money in the belief that it would be changed into life. Such people took the risk and built this building and paid for it with that kind of faith.

Every day I see people whose lives are being changed by this church. There are folks who come here, hopeless, afraid, despairing, or in trouble. As one person wrote on a prayer request form one Sunday--"Sometimes I feel like I just can't go on and I don't think I can stand the pressure of another day. Would you please remember me in your prayers and those like me? Is it possible to die from loneliness and a broken heart?"

Each Sunday, here and on the radio, we reach people like that and lives are changed. We give them what we have from God; the hope that vibrates within our people; the love which is shared by so many here; the faith that allows us to "hang-in-there" through the agonies of today and in the face of the unknown tomorrow.

Authentic caring goes on here in the name of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. And people are helped, changed, and empowered. We don't do it in and of ourselves, but the life and Spirit that is here in this church does it.

Because this building is here, and the ministry of this church is here and you are here, money gets changed into life.

In my desk drawer I have all kinds of proof. Some letters, some short notes, but all expressing how people have been helped or healed, or guided or strengthened or loved or or inspirited by this congregation and its people. First-Plymouth Church is in the business of changing money into life.

And there are so many people who are seeking to find life and God. I wish you could personally read all the prayer-requests that come in and know of the deep needs of people, and they come here for help. Here are a few samples. One child wrote, "God help my father to stop drinking and help my good friend to not take drugs anymore, and help people to like me for who I am."

Another said, "Include in your prayers a friend whose fears and anxieties are causing much pain to herself and those who care about her and pray for another friend who will undergo painful surgery this week at Bryan Hospital."

Another said,"Pray for children who are abused by their parents and for parents who don't realize what they are doing to their loved ones in their anger." Another said, "Please -pray for a girlfriend of mine who is going through a personal crisis. She has decided to have an abortion. Please help her feel God's love." And another said, "My parents are getting a divorce. I need the strength of the Lord now more than ever. Please help me!"

We change money into life. You can find your own examples of how money is being changed into life. Perhaps it is money translated into the beauty of a piece of music rendered with the kind of excellence and intensity that stirs something inside, that allows us to feel God's presence.

Maybe it is money translated into heat and light in a building where boys and girls can come for Scout meetings,

recreation, music groups, education, where facilities are provided for support groups, community groups, special forums and events and concerts where literally hundreds of people come each week. Perhaps it is money changed into life through personal counseling or visits to the sick and shut-in, or Bibles given to young people, or a congregation gathered for worship.

There is a lot of money-changing going on in First-Plymouth Church--the kind of money-changing we can be proud of. I suppose my favorite letter came from a woman sometime ago. She said, "My husband and I listen to your good sermons before we go to our own church each Sunday morning. I want you to know that your sermon yesterday motivated my husband (who is not well) to give me the nicest Christmas gift he has given me in nearly forty-six years of marriage. He said, 'after hearing Dr. Young's sermon and since it is Christmas and all, I want you to know it has been hard for me to say, but I have always loved you."

We are in the business of changing money into life. This morning in a few minutes we are going to pass out the pledge cards. I challenge you not to be like the third servant in the parable, but like the first two--be a bold Christian, take a risk, make a pledge much higher than you at first planned. Double your pledge! Our budget for 1980, is going to be at least 12% higher than the present year. We need more money so that we can change it into more life. Don't just consider a 12% increase. Give what you should be giving. Give cheerfully. Remember the words of Jesus, "Do not worry, put your heart on the kingdom of God first, and all these other things shall be yours as well."

~~Will the ushers now please distribute the pledge cards~~