Sunday, November 1, 1992
MOVING FROM FEAR TO JOY (No. 3 in a Series: Recovering our Spiritual Heritage)
II Corinthians 8:1-2, 9:6-8

"Why do so many people in our country feel so bad when they've got it so good?" For its 75th Anniversary Issue in September of this year, Forbes magazine asked eleven of America's best writers and scholars to attempt to answer this question.

As I mentioned in the first sermon in this series, when I read these articles, I found a common thread. It isn't the national debt, unemployment rate, or current recession that is making so many people feel so bad. It's a spiritual problem. Too many people have lost their spiritual heritage, and others never had one.

What is this spiritual heritage I'm referring to? Our Christian faith, with its Hebrew roots, teaches that we are spiritual beings having a human experience; that deep within each one of us is a spiritual center, a spiritual energy that pervades every part of what we know as our physical bodies. We are born into this world with this spiritual center, with the Spirit of God as part of us, and when we pay attention to it and follow its guidance, everything in this life changes. Whatever you do, your endeavors begin to "flow," and you start to make decisions with less and less effort. You find that no matter your occupation, profession, or how you spend your time if you're retired, your worries and anxieties no longer control your actions. You discover that you can act and not simply react. You find an inner peace and happiness that pervades your life.

But there are so many things in this world that get us out of alignment with our spiritual center. We are always tempted to believe the promises of this world rather than the promises of God. For example, many swallow the idea that accumulating more and more things will satisfy them or that gaining more power or prestige will fill the vacuum in their lives. People become fearful when they think they might lose some of their wealth or have to lower their standard of living in any way, and any change is seen as a threat.

For those of us who are Christians, we forget that as a spiritual leader, Jesus made the most astounding promises to all who pay attention to their spiritual centers. A few examples: "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." "Seek first the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He also promised his followers that they would be able to do greater works than he did. It's a matter of putting first things first.

If we are to recover our spiritual heritage, it means rethinking many of the beliefs we have been taught by the world in which we live. Some of these worldly beliefs take on an almost sacred character.

In last week's sermon, for example, I pointed out that we need to overcome the "big lie." Undoubtedly, there's more than one "big lie" to conquer, but the particular one I talked about last week has a number of versions. In general, it is this: the belief that we are limited as human beings and therefore cannot grow or change. Thus, some of us say, "I cannot help the way I am. I've always been this way." Others say, "It's my nature. I inherited who I am, and it can't be changed." Or, "My personality is controlled by my body chemistry. There's nothing I can do about it." Or, "The family environment in which I was raised has made me this way, and

I can't overcome it." Or, "I can't escape my culture and my times. It has made me what I am, and I'm trapped."

Too many people want to blame others or something outside themselves for the way they are, and thus they never get around to paying attention to their spiritual center, preventing themselves from becoming what God intends them to be and what they truly want to be. The Bible says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds."

Thus, recovering our spiritual heritage means we have to put aside many of the beliefs we have picked up from the world around us and begin to imagine new kinds of possibilities. Jesus called it "being born anew."

In this sermon, I am going to talk about how to move from scarcity to abundance and from stinginess to generosity so that you can move in your life from fear to joy. Again, remember, Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

To begin, here are several questions I want you to answer in your own mind:

Do you believe that in this present world there is not enough of anything? Not enough love, not enough money, not enough creativity, not enough talent, not enough prosperity?

Do you believe that you have to get yours and hold on to it as tightly as you can, or someone else will grab it before you?

Do you believe that you might become too generous and therefore won't have enough left for yourself?

Do you find it difficult to truly rejoice in the prosperity and good fortune of others?

Our Christian faith outlines some key principles that God has built into this creation which can help you deal with these questions. Knowing these principles and acting on them can help you move from scarcity to abundance and from fear to joy, and in the process, you will be on the way to recovering your spiritual heritage.

First, you need to begin with yourself, especially with your inner self, to experience God's abundance, and that means ridding yourself of a scarcity consciousness.
You cannot experience abundance or prosperity if you continue to believe in scarcity. In order to recover your spiritual heritage, you need to know that as a spiritual being, you lack absolutely nothing — all that you need for life is already here and was within you when you arrived here in the physical world.

However, when you say to yourself, "I don't have enough money," or "I don't have enough talent or strength to live life fully," you are believing in a world of scarcity. You have become a prisoner of "deficiency motivation." That is, you assess all the things that are missing in your life, and then you set up a plan to repair all of those deficiencies. You say to yourself, "I need more money, more strength, more power, more beauty, more possessions, more talent." You mistakenly believe, "When I get those things, I will have prosperity, and I will be happy."

So you go to work to get "more." But this is a gigantic trap. When you get the money you thought you needed to be prosperous or happy, you are not satisfied. Your mindset hasn't

been satisfied. Your mindset is focused on still more, on striving, not arriving. This is a common theme in our culture.

A successful businessman said to his minister, “I have never been so depressed. I have even been considering suicide.” “What’s the problem?” asked his minister. The man replied, “All I know is that I am unhappy. Maybe it’s my age. I recently celebrated my 50th birthday, but I have no contentment at this stage of my life.” This man was extremely successful. He had a high income, a beautiful home, two luxury cars, everything money could buy, but he was still unhappy. The minister suggested that the man try giving away some of his money. But the man said, “I don’t want to be happy quite that much.” This individual was operating from a deficiency motivation.

But there is another kind of motivation that is an integral part of our spiritual heritage. It’s one of the key principles. It can be called “growth motivation,” and it’s the opposite of “deficiency motivation.” You know that God has already given you all that you need. You also know that when you begin to trust your spiritual center, you will continue to grow. With this kind of thinking, deficiencies are impossible. You begin to be motivated in your life by your own dreams. When you no longer feel you are lacking anything, you can live the life you know is perfect for you.

A second key principle of our spiritual heritage in helping us to move from scarcity to abundance and from fear to joy is to know that in God’s presence there is no “better” or “worse.” When you understand yourself as a spiritual being, then you can stop the incessant comparing that leads you to believe that others are more deserving or less deserving than you. In God’s creation, you are in a partnership with all other human beings. Life is not a contest where God judges some people to be better or worse than others.
If you have to gain your sense of self-worth by comparing yourself to others, it’s a false worth. Nowhere did Jesus ever suggest that it is only natural to compare oneself with others or that it is natural to learn to play dirty in order to get ahead of other people. Even if others choose to measure their value by comparison with others, you do not have to live by that model. That kind of comparing only keeps you from moving from fear to joy.

Earlier, I asked if you find it difficult to rejoice in the prosperity of others. If you do, then you are keeping yourself from recovering your spiritual heritage. When you feel contemptuous or even a twinge of jealousy toward the accomplishments, lifestyles, or good luck of others, you are harboring negativity where love must reside. It’s connected to that belief in scarcity — that someone else’s good fortune is at your expense; that there’s not enough good fortune to go around. You cannot feel fulfilled and envious at the same time. Remember, when you evaluate and judge others, you do not define them; you define yourself. Do you want to define yourself as a jealous, nonloving being and have that grow in your life?

If you feel satisfied and happy, that is what you have to give away, and the more you give away, the more you will have.

The third key principle in moving from fear to joy and from scarcity to abundance, thereby recovering your spiritual heritage, is about joyful, generous giving.
Each year, around this time, we ask the members and friends of this church to renew and hopefully increase their financial support for the work of this congregation. Some of you have already received pledge cards in the mail, and within the next few days, all of you will have received pledge cards in the mail for 1993.

As I've said before, your giving of money for the work of this church will do as much or more for you personally as it does for the church. You cannot move from fear to joy and from scarcity to abundance without becoming a cheerful giver.

Jesus knew and taught that you cannot become a deeply spiritual person unless you get rid of the conflict you may have about money. The denouncing of money is a trap. It's not how much money one has, but how one uses it. You can be spiritual and have nice things. You can be spiritual and have money flow into your life. But you cannot be a spiritual being or recover your spiritual heritage if the arrival of that money is for the purpose of hoarding it or using it to prove to yourself and others that you are in some way superior.

Jesus taught that money is like love — the more you give it away for worthwhile purposes that serve others, the more you will have. If you are not a generous giver when it is difficult, you won't be generous when you have more money. Research shows that on a percentage basis, most people become more stingy. That's why the Bible suggests giving a certain percentage of whatever you have and staying with that percentage or increasing it. Jesus taught that generous, cheerful giving is the most spiritual activity of all. Then you move from fear to joy and from scarcity to abundance.

I personally believe and have discovered in my own life that becoming a tither, a 10% giver, will deepen your spiritual life more than anything else you can do. I urge you, as an act of faith, to try it. Perhaps you won't be able to do it all at once. Begin with six percent or seven, and then in three or four years, you will be at ten percent. Allow yourself to grow in generosity rather than shrink.

Most important of all, if you want to truly recover your spiritual heritage and move from a life of fear to a life of joy, and from a life of scarcity to a life of abundance, you need to give from a level of abundant generosity. Some give on the level of self-interest, always asking, "What's in it for me?" Others give on a level of obligation. They make only a minimum pledge because they do not want to be thought of as "free-loaders." Still others never think much about what they are giving and give only the same minimum amount year after year. Thus, they never grow in the joy of giving.

I invite you to discover the true joy of giving. It will help you recover your spiritual heritage. Amen.