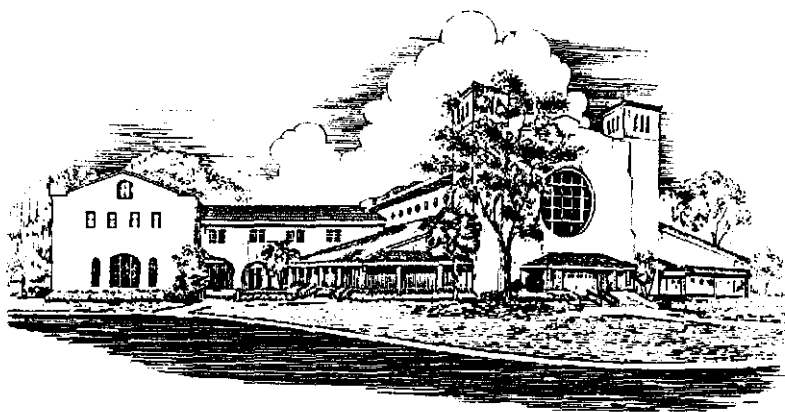


First Church Pulpit

**"HOW MUCH IS YOUR FAITH, GOD,
JESUS CHRIST, YOUR CHURCH, HEAVEN,
AND A NEW WORLD WORTH . . . PER WEEK?"**

**Text: "...but, lay up for yourselves treasure in Heaven...for where your treasure
is, there will your heart be also." — (Matthew 6:20,21)**



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33301

**ALL SAINTS DAY
NOVEMBER 1, 1987**

RICHARD M. CROMIE, Minister

A powerful and ponderous question begins our Sermon today: "How much is your faith, God, Jesus Christ, your Church, Heaven, and a new world worth to you...per week?"

One lovely lady, on whom I tried this question earlier in the week said, almost with tears in her eyes: "More than I could ever pay. More than I could ever pay!" So say we all. I want to talk at this Stewardship Season about your gifts and mine to Christ and His Church. The Lord has been working on me in the last four years, since I first arrived to South Florida. Having lived in the same northern city all my life, I had to learn the peculiarities of this area. The longer I am here, the more I realize how different, and how the same we really are. When I first came, I was surprised at how casual was your giving record. I even bragged that the church I served in Pittsburgh pledged twice as many dollars as First Church in Fort Lauderdale, with about half as much money. I realize that was less than subtle, like telling your wife that your mother made a strawberry shortcake twice as good as hers.

Then, I teased you for a while. I distributed free sticks of double-mint gum and said: "Double your pleasure, double your pledge." Some of you did. I shall always remember your commitment.

Then, I encouraged you to tithe. That practically scared you to death. But the Bible requires ten percent of our income: take it on the gross, or take it on the net, whatever makes you happier, because God loves a cheerful giver. We had some marvelous and wonderful increases. Then, for a capital improvement campaign, I brought down a big heavy hitter from a northern firm. He would do it, would he? Hmmm? Our Gift For the Future campaign...we raised an additional three and one-half million, not nearly enough.

All the while, I was becoming aware that most people down here are individuals; you did not find success in Florida by being dumb. And you are just about as stubborn as the Presbyterians were in Pennsylvania...that anything I would try to trick you with was not going to work...that you either love the Lord as I love the Lord, or you don't, and you would respond (Are you listening?) as Christ commanded you to do.

Well, I want to be positive this year, more than ever before. I want to thank you who have responded. When I think what some of you, say single parents, or retirees on schoolteacher's pensions fixed thirty years ago; when I think what you give to the Church of Jesus Christ, I am embarrassed, even though Mrs. Cromie and our

children and I give a full ten percent tithe of our gross income. But I am embarrassed about what it takes for some of you to sacrifice to support this church. I thank God for you. That is the first shift in my approach and attitude this year: I want more to say thanks than to beg for more.

A second shift is here also. They teach you that when you are raising money, you have to go where the money is. The top ten percent of gifts, normally the majority of your budget, comes from the top few givers; so you need to learn how to appeal to the large giver to survive. This church has done that for many years.

Well, I found out something about South Florida wealth. It did not come by accident, nor fall like pennies from heaven. Most people worked hard for it. Like they said to Willie Sutton, asking him why he robbed banks. He replied: "Because that is where the money is." Our main appeal was to the wealthy. Wealthy people like to have recognition. Right? Wrong. Two of the top three givers to the "Gift For the Future" campaign told me that if I used their names, they would never give again. People with money in our church are not looking for honors. They are grateful for what God has given them, and for the privilege of giving some of it back.

This year I want more to involve all of us. Not that we didn't before, but we all need the privilege of being part of Christ's work.

In the last four years, we have taken in nine hundred new members. That's grand! If you notice carefully each month, many of them are quite young, young couples, families, or singles. That means ipso facto what a retired millionaire could do by giving stock (Up to the last week, anyway), held for thirty years, and heavily appreciated, it would take a hundred of those couples giving everything they can manage every week.

Further, our chief Financial Adviser, one of the oldest members of this church, told me: "Richard, we are dying out...." (By "we" he meant the older members.) "Big money in Florida is not as available as it is used to be." More people are now working people, year around, living from paycheck to paycheck. They might set a little aside for a rainy day, if they are lucky, and the roof doesn't leak. But it is "a little"! If they do not somehow arrange their giving program, there would be nothing for the church. Then, when the wealthy are gone, our church will be in trouble!

So, today and next week, I want to talk to you who do not have great wealth; who have no family income and no inheritance to look forward to, and no lucky investments; the people who live from week to week, or every two weeks; the people who would not know a "put" from a "call", and care less; and who have no "futures" to claim, except the One

offered by Jesus Christ. I want to speak to singles, and young couples, and teens, and beginning workers, and the retired, and secretaries, and clerks, and assistants.

I told our teenagers that if each of them pledged a few dollars a week, every week, it would bring twenty thousand additional dollars to the church. Young couples, just starting, listen: If the young couples of our church would pledge a dollar a day (Think of where you spend a dollar every day) to the church, it would mean an additional \$150,000 that we could give away to help alleviate the miseries of God's people. If half of them refuse, we would be \$75,000 short. There is not one person I know of in this church who could make it up and add a \$75,000 pledge to what they are giving now.

Large gifts are nice. One actress said: "I have been rich, and I have been poor, and rich is better." It is. But if all of us do not learn to pull together, like parts of the same team, the church is not going to prosper. We cannot live on the past.

Secondly, get your mind going deeper. I want to ask you: Have you ever wondered why you give, or why you don't? I confess, it is often a mystery to me, even in myself...I suppose it was my parents, or my early teachers, or my pastors, I don't know.

I like that cartoon of the minister, who was in his study following the service, with his assistant. In front of them were two enormous collection baskets, overflowing with money...fifty and hundred-dollar bills, twenties, tens and fives. Astonished, he looked at his assistant, and said: "We better go over that sermon again.... I must have said something...." It is a mystery sometimes.

But what prompts you to give? Anybody here, honestly, is there anything I could say that would make you give more, or less, to the church? Hmmm? In all the stewardship sermons you have ever heard, has anyone ever enticed you to give more to the church? Church giving is not fund-raising. Other groups need to raise funds, but we give...why? Because God first gave to us.

And do you remember what He gave? He gave His only Son. I would not give mine, or any of my daughters, for anyone. Never! But God gave His only Son so that we could live. So, Christians do not give because it makes us feel good (Though I hope it does). We do not give because we feel guilty. You do not give so you can buy your way into Heaven (Good thing for some of you, Ha!). You cannot buy your way to God's favor; He gives it as a gift. We give as a response, right?

So, I ask you again: "How Much is Your Faith, God, Jesus Christ, your

Church, Heaven, and a New World Worth...Per Week?" It is up to you. I pray that the Holy Spirit will touch you somehow.

Because in Matthew 6, very interesting...it is so familiar we sometimes miss the power behind it. Jesus Christ is saying: "You have to lay up treasure somewhere." I mean, you have to invest your life in something. You have to do something with your money, and your time, and your energy, right? He does not even say that you should not be selfish. He says we are allowed to lay up for ourselves, and our future, and our families. But where? Not treasures of the earth....Glory Hallelujah! The Bible says we continue to gather, and we do not know who will get it after we are gone.

I look around my house sometimes, having been through death with my parents and Peggy's mother, and I think: "I wonder who is going to worry about all these things someday.... My things...." Jesus said, in those words that apply more to his culture than to ours, though I think we can catch hold of them.... They did not have stocks, and bonds, and bank accounts. They mainly had fine linens, tapestries, perishables. Those were the signs of wealth. And the moths could get in there and eat them to pieces. Jesus said: "You store it all up, and the moths will come and

get it." (Or, in a current idiom, the market will crash one Monday.) Rust actually means anything that deteriorates. You put your grain in the barn, the rats and mice sneak in to eat it, or the barn burns down.... Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust corrupt, and thieves break in and steal....

You know, one night when we were there back in Pittsburgh, a thief came in to our house. Nothing insulted us more, ever, than someone breaking in to our house! He stole our money, and he stole all Peggy's jewelry. (By the way, he discarded every piece of her jewelry in the neighbor's yard, which made me start buying her better jewelry. But you know what I mean.)

We had a friend, who had silver for the fifth generation of her family. Five generations! Do you know how long that is? And some thief came in one night, he cut a hole in the middle of the panelled front door, and thereby escaped the sophisticated system of electronic surveillance; and stole five generations worth of silver! One day they had everything; a beautiful closetful of treasures. The next day they had none of it left, and the police never found it.

"How much is your Faith, God, Jesus Christ, Heaven, and the New World worth to you?"

Let us vary the theme just a little, and then we will go. How much is it worth to save a life? Your church is involved every day in saving lives, in rescuing people, in starting them out again, in giving them new hope, in helping them with loved ones.... How much is a life worth? Hmmm? Do you know how much it cost society when Jessica McClure, the little eighteen-month old girl in Midland, Texas, was trapped in a well for fifty-six hours? Do you you know what one conservative estimate said it cost to rescue her? Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars... for one little girl. Was it worth it? You bet it was.

I remember the father in Pittsburgh, whose son had a curious illness. They told him he might have to take the boy to New York to the finest hospital, and it would cost a fortune, not covered by insurance. He said: "We'll sell the house. That is my boy!" That is how much a life is worth....

Or, when you rescue a young man from the ghetto, or help a prisoner back to life, what is that worth? It costs on the average one hundred thousand dollars to build each prison cell; and on the average, another twenty thousand dollars per year to keep the prisoner in it. Every time a potential criminal is rescued by the ministries of this and other churches, it is not only nice, it is an economic extravaganza for all of us. How much

is it worth to have the influence of Mike Davis, our Minister to Youth, or Steve Harberts, or Dr. Henderson, or Bill Stephenson and Katy, in the young people's choir.... How much is it worth to give your child direction in our Christian Education Program with Mrs. Dooley, and all who serve.... how much is it worth??

Glory Hallelujah! I am finished! "How much is your Faith, God, Jesus Christ, your Church, Heaven, and the New World worth...per week?"

Now, you do not have to answer this week. I give you seven days to think about it, and pray about it. I have two little favors to ask this year.

1. I ask you simply as your pastor and friend to give whatever you are able. If it is a dollar a week, that is fine. If it is a hundred dollars a week, that is fine. Will you think about what you can give each week?

2. Then, secondly, will you sign a little pledge card, saying you will give every week, even when you miss church that Sunday? That way Christ can count on you.

I close with a funny little story. There was a little woman in our parish up north, who had a little box of envelopes. This poor woman had been sick for almost two years. Her pledge was one dollar a week. And, glory be

to God, the day came when finally she made it back to the church. Her friend brought her in a wheelchair. When the offering trays were passed, she dropped one hundred and four envelopes with a one dollar bill in each...our treasurer had to open them all. I said: "Hey, Alan, it says in the Bible that each week we are to put something aside for the Lord!" Each week. I smile when I think of her pleasure every Sunday morning, sitting at home by the radio, listening to our broadcast, and putting her dollar in the envelope. It might be called the widow's mite, but all of Heaven smiled as well. Right? Right.

Until we meet again, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give peace to you and those you love, wherever they may be. Now and forevermore. Amen.