

(Kick off for Every Member Canvass)

It's time to talk about money again, so.... let's start with a joke.

A wealthy man left a relative a million dollars, but the heir to the fortune was in a hospital recovering from a massive heart attack. The executor of the estate was afraid to tell her of her good fortune for fear it might bring on another heart attack and kill her. So, the pastor was asked to break the news in a way that wouldn't excite the patient. The pastor began his visit with small talk about the church. Then he said, "Jane, I'd like to ask you a question. What would you do if you inherited a million dollars?" Jane thought for a minute and said, "Preacher, I'd give half of it to the church." And right there and then the *preacher* had a heart attack and keeled over in shock.

When you talk about money, you must be prepared for surprises. This has been a year of surprises. It all started last year at this time...it's all coming back to me now.... Do you recall last year, when we kicked off our Every Member Canvass? That was the month that the stock market totally tanked and our gas tanks were empty due to a hurricane in Texas. For weeks all of us experienced the realities of hoarding and scarcity right here in Brevard. But in our church quite the opposite happened. Last year folks prayed about their pledge to the church and we were able to weather the desert storm of scarcity. The good people of this parish did not hoard their gifts; they shared their gifts. In fact, last year we ended up raising more money in pledges than we ever had before. Now, a year has gone by. The reality of the markets is hitting a lot of us. Cash is tighter than many of us anticipated, BUT pledges are still being honored.

Because of your leap of faith...

St. Philip's Parish was able to continue to give generously, tens of thousands of dollars this year, to local and global charities that are staggering from carrying increased numbers of our neighbors in poverty.

St. Philip's Parish was able to continue to support our youth program and nurture the little and not-so-little ones amongst us as they grow their faith.

St. Philip's Parish was able to continue to support our bishop and our diocese and the Episcopal Church in ministries that extend into the mountains of Western North Carolina and all over the world.

St. Philip's Parish was able to repair the roof and replace an air conditioner and windows in the education wing to increase energy efficiency and stewardship of the earth.

St. Philip's Parish was able to support ministries of this parish not only with physical presence and commitment but with real dollars that are needed to purchase materials, music, provide hospitality, and pay livable wages to full and part-time staff.

It takes all of us to grow the Good News of Jesus Christ. It takes all of us to give from what's been given to us. Not all of us can give the same amounts, so it takes all of us to pool our varied resources to keep the Good Ship St. Philip's afloat.

I don't know how it is with you, but I've noticed something that happens to me in regard to cash flow streams. With me, and I suspect with others, there are seasons of scarcity and seasons of abundance. It's hard to predict when these seasons will turn. Whether I have a lot or a little amount of money, as the saying goes, this too shall pass. Sometimes I have extra cash on hand and sometimes I don't. Sometimes my funds are flush and sometimes they are scarce.

I've had seasons in my life where my meager widow's mite was all I had to give back to God and it wasn't as much as I hoped it could be. I envied those who could so comfortably give more. There have also been seasons where I was deeply pleased to be able to give more than my fair share to my church. 5%, 10%, 20%.... it's varied over the years. I trust that it all evens out over time. Whatever the percentage of my income I give, it is between God and me. I'm the pass through. All that I have is a gift from God, which I merely return. God even says to go ahead and skim 90% of it off for my own use. Wow! That's a pretty good deal, if you think about it.

Cash flow is a touchy subject right now. It's touchy here at the church, and it's touchy at the diocese, the National Church, local charities, retirement funds, state budgets, Main Street, hospital budgets, school budgets, ...you name it, nearly everyone is being rattled by cash flow issues. Tempers are flaring and anxiety is pervasive. I would not be

surprised to hear that your own household budgets have been adversely affected by the cash flow crunches that are rippling through our lives. I've heard it said that, if asked, nearly everyone feels like all they need is about \$10,000, no matter their income, and then they could breathe easier. It's clear that we all desire an infusion of cash, but perhaps that's not going to come any time soon. It's also clear that we all have to tighten our belts a bit and trim away excess expenses. That's not necessarily a bad thing. All of us are in this cash flow crunch together, this church included. Some are feeling it more than others. That's the reality of these economic times.

But here in this place we also live in all places at all times. In the Church we are on a mission that makes no sense. We are on a mission to proclaim to the world that *their* way of doing business isn't *our* way of doing business. We are the crazy hopeful ones. Throughout time we always have been. We believe that God's gifts are abundant. We believe that our needs are few. We believe that only in releasing God's gifts, not in hoarding, can this world be transformed by the Good News of Jesus' love for all. We are called to pay attention to the little children, the poor, the outcasts, and the sick. We are called to be advocates for those who have no voice or power in this world.

In today's lesson the disciples proudly come to Jesus to tattle-tale on a stranger casting out demons in Jesus' name. But Jesus says to the disciples, "Do not stop him, you've got it all wrong. This man who performs deeds of power in my name is OK. Pay attention to what he does." Jesus makes it clear that the purpose for all of us is to cast out demons, not to set up a bureaucracy for the approval of who's in the good graces of the church club and who is not in the good graces of the church club.

Jesus shifts the judgmental conversation. He holds up a mirror to the disciples and turns the focus back to the disciples to show them where they need to grow. It has to do, Jesus says, with the choices you make, the way you manage your life. If the way you live your life becomes a stumbling block for these little ones with no voice— then maybe it may be better for you if you had not been born.

So this morning I ask you to set aside some time in the next few weeks. Give up your time and ponder your own choices as you sit down in prayer

with your pledge card in hand. We invite you to bring your pledge card to church on October 18 for an ingathering at each of the three services. Bring it right up here to the Table. But before you formalize your pledge, I invite you to ask yourself some hard questions.

Why are you here?

Do you buy into the mission of this parish? It's listed right here in the bulletin every single week.

Are you committed to give your support to the many ministries, both seen and unseen, which flow out of this parish?

What is your pledge to God?

What is your own personal, private solemn binding promise to God?

What is a pledge anyway? I think I can tell you what it isn't.

Your pledge isn't membership dues to an elite club of insiders. It isn't patron sponsorship recognition based on your level of giving.

It isn't a vote for or against the church club officers.

It's not a political statement. At least it shouldn't be.

Your pledge is between you and God, but it takes all of us to honor it. None of us can do all of this alone. The wonderful, scary thing is that it takes all of us to honor your pledge. If we do this together, without reluctance or fear... with gladness and generosity....together we will keep ourselves from stumbling....Together, we will catch a few others who otherwise would surely fall. Indeed, it takes all of us. Amen.