



**“Why Do We Give?”**  
**Scripture – Matthew 6:24-34**  
**Sermon Preached by Gregory Knox Jones**  
**Sunday, October 27, 2013**

What wakes you in the middle of the night? Outliving your retirement savings? Contracting a life-threatening illness? Your child’s future? Losing your job? The safety of a loved one?

I worry about members of our congregation: those who are in poor health; those who have mental health issues; those who have drifted away from church; those who struggle with an addiction.

If you cannot name at least a handful of matters that worry you, we had better check your pulse. Worries come with life; it is part of the package. So, what do we make of this reading from the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus says, “Do *not* worry”?

It is easy to strike up a debate with Jesus on this one. If we are compassionate, we are bound to worry about people in misery. If we are concerned about justice, we worry about people who are exploited. Worrying about how terrible things might turn out, motivates us to strive for something better. Have no anxiety about tomorrow? That does not square with Jesus’ command to love others and to care for the poor and the neglected.

But, lest we forget, Jesus often employed hyperbole. Time after time, Jesus exaggerated the crux of his message in order to drive it home. Today’s words come from the Sermon on the Mount, a series of teachings in which Jesus routinely overstated his case to make his point memorable.

The other thing to keep in mind is that Jesus introduced this admonition not to worry by talking about a specific subject that often has anxiety Velcroed to it: Money. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Jesus knew people spend far too much time worrying about money. There is never enough to make us feel secure. Although Jesus never uses the word in this passage, his underlying message is about trust. Where do you put your trust – in money or in God?

If you put your trust in money, you will clutch it tightly and say, “Mine!” If you put your trust in God, you will give away a portion of your wealth to insure that the Christian community will continue to stand as a mighty lighthouse in a world beleaguered by too much darkness.

Four of our members share why it is important to them to give to Westminster:

**Jamie Hickey**

Our family became a member of Westminster in 1991 while I was pregnant with our first child, Brandon. We were actively looking for a church home and knew the moment we walked into the Sanctuary, listened to a very moving sermon and met many people during coffee hour that this was it. We were home!

Westminster was in the midst of major additions and renovations that were very exciting to us as a couple about to become new parents. We wanted a church that had other young families that our children could grow with. A group called “Parents with Young Children” was soon formed and became the backbone of our social life. We watched our children learn their Bible stories, read music and sing in the various choirs, become socially aware and care, and eventually grow wings and fly off with such a sense of peace and confidence. What else could we ask for?

Our church family has given us support through many ups and downs. They held me up when a co-worker committed suicide. They helped my husband and me make some of the toughest decisions we have ever made where our children are concerned. They’ve been there to celebrate the victories that our daughter, Britt, has made as together we wind through the journey of her life together. They have always been there as a good listener.

Transitioning from the workplace to a role as a “stay at home mom” was more challenging than I expected. Anne Ledbetter quickly scooped me up and got me involved in an inter-generational small group called Kairos. Once again – I felt saved and uplifted. These women are still an important part of my life. We studied the Bible and summer sermon series while waiting for babies to be born to 3 of our younger members and grandbabies to some of our older members. What joy we shared!

Then came Hurricane Katrina and WPC’s Traveling Group of Carpenters that traveled to New Orleans. I was honored to be a part of two of these groups. The first one included a trip of mutual learning with our oldest son, Brandon. What a trip, learning to properly hammer a nail, use a table saw, how to move very long ladders without taking out the first floor windows, putting on roof shingles, etc.

Why Do We Give? We give for the love of our Church, the forgiveness of our sins by God, and the sharing of our spirit with each other.

**Dave McBride**

Why do Sally and I give? There are many reasons, but the simplest is that we give because of each of you. We give because of what you have given to us and with the hope that this church will be able to give the same to others.

First, you have allowed us to be part of your spiritual tradition and spiritual experience without requiring us to profess belief in any particular form of Christian orthodoxy or doctrine. It was enough that we believed in love, believed in the divinity that touches each of us through Jesus Christ and believed that our shared destiny ultimately would reunite us with God. We began coming to Westminster almost by chance. We were attracted by the adult education programs. It was the participants in those adult education programs and Jon Walton—then the pastor—who taught us that Christianity is not incompatible with a questioning intellect or using new concepts to express ancient and enduring truths. I believe there are millions of Americans, like us, who yearn for the opportunity to share a sense of the spiritual and the transcendental with an open and accepting community. You have been that community for us, and we hope our giving will help this church to be that place for others.

Second, you have allowed us to love our children without fear, condemnation or isolation. When my two oldest children were in their pre-teen years, I was delighted when one of our neighbors told me—after watching my

sons playing “army” in the alley and baseball in park—that our boys were “All-American” boys. That meant so much to me. In those days, what we wanted more than anything was for our children to love and be loved, to have the opportunity to enjoy meaningful careers, and to have large families with grandchildren Sally and I could spoil. Little did I know back then that my children would break the mold of being All-American. Little did I know that my oldest son would be gay and my youngest child transgender. But what this church has taught us in these last years is that we could love our children, not reject them, for their differences, and our family could still be part of this shared Christian tradition; that our children could still love and be loved; that our children could still have the same opportunities now as before; and that our friends and neighbors in this sanctuary might say, as our friend said years ago, that our children are All-American children. I believe there are millions of Americans whose children are different in some manner or another, millions who fear for the economic or social future of their children, millions who long for a community that will embrace their children, millions who seek a community where their children may love and be loved. You have been that community for us, and we hope our giving will help this church be that place for others.

### **Ed Morton**

When asked to talk about the question “Why do I give?”, the answer seemed seem simple enough at first. I’m on the younger side and interested in the longevity of Westminster, I have two young children that consume Westminster’s resources, I should help Westminster’s constant mission to help others, it is the right thing to do, etc. However, as I reflected on the question, I realized the answers that first popped into my head, while certainly be valid and important, were not necessarily complete.

If the giving of money, time or talent is something that God asks of us, perhaps the better question is “Why does God ask me to give?” The answer to that question is probably much different than the initial one. The most likely answer is that, as with all of God’s “asks”, God’s desire is for a closer relationship with me. And that leads to another question: “What does giving have to do with my relationship with God anyway?”

The answer to that question is as varied as the membership of Westminster itself – so here is mine. It likely surprises no one that I am perhaps just a touch of an “uber-planner” when it comes to my family and finances. Not that I’m trying to paint myself as particularly frugal, but finances and the long-term impact/benefit for my family are points of constant focus for me.

However, as with many other things in life, such control is an illusion. The economy can severely impact even thoroughly considered investments. The most diligent employees can find themselves without work. Catastrophic illness can force us to devote accumulated resources to helping a loved one “beat the odds.” Every time I sit down to write a check to Westminster (or anyone else for that matter), I think of times I might need or want to use that money in other ways.

But I would submit – that is where faith enters in. What I believe God desires of me is faith that God will provide the resources that I need for my life, notwithstanding all the ways in which I believe those resources might be depleted. Every time I give, I am actually affirming that I trust God to provide; a difficult affirmation for an admitted “control freak.” And just to clarify, I am talking about providing for needs – not wants – lest anyone view this as a televangelist-style message about some perceived “karmic reciprocity of giving” to the church! This consistent act of faith in letting go of my human worries and wants and re-affirming my faith in God to provide helps focus me on the true power at work for my family – and this submission is what I believe God asks of me when I give.

### **Sue Linderman**

It was December 22, 1986, and I was wrapping Christmas gifts when the call came. There had been an accident at the ‘Y’. When I got to the hospital, I was too frantic to appreciate the significance of a woman escorting me

to a separate space off the Emergency Room. I saw the doctor's mouth moving and heard, "We did everything we could...." Just like that [snap], life as I knew and loved it was over – my husband Chuck had died.

Days and weeks of fog would be suddenly and sharply penetrated by anguish; tears came out of nowhere. I was lost. I begged to know "Why me?" Was I being punished for sins known or unknown? How could I possibly keep going – for myself, for my stepchildren who depended on me? My mother, anxious to help, invited me back to Westminster. Some Sundays, it was simply something to do, someplace to be, to keep from obsessing over my grief.

Gradually, by way of sermons that seemed directed specifically to me, prayers that spoke of grief yet of hope, the incredible blessing of a Stephen Minister who walked with me every week for months and months, glimmers of the faith in which I had been raised began to surface. I came to know so many wonderful people in this congregation, people who gave of themselves without any expectation of return.

Ten years later, when I retired from corporate America and came to work here as Church Administrator, I felt like I was jumping off a financial cliff. For a while, I agonized over the decision to leave such financial ease behind. Then one day I, who hadn't studied the Bible since I was a kid, heard the words of today's Scripture passage and thought to myself, I either trust in that or I don't. And if I do.....So here I am.

I believe, to the depths of my being, that everything I have – my life, my health, my capabilities, my work, my resources, my marriage, my friends – are gifts entrusted to me by my God. I am grateful beyond measure for knowing that, no matter what befalls me – the deaths of those so dear, the cancer diagnosis, loved ones suffering the tragedies of addiction or abuse – I am not alone – "for Thou art with me".

Each day of my life, I am aware at one moment or another (though not when somebody cuts me off in traffic or I can't get the TV remote to work!) that I am a blessed child of God. Perhaps my greatest blessing is the sense of gratitude that calls on me to share. I give to Westminster because my life has been transformed here, as have so many others, both within our congregation and beyond our walls. Generosity changes everything. Thanks be to our God!

### **Concluding remarks by Dr. Jones**

We come into this world with nothing and we leave this world with nothing. Our very existence and all we have during our lifetimes comes from God. The question that each of us answers by the manner in which we live is this: How will I use what God has entrusted to me?

Jesus calls on us to give away a portion of our wealth to demonstrate that we serve God, not money.

He tells us to give to express our gratitude to God for the gift of life. He encourages us to give to become a generous person. He challenges us to give to learn the value of making a sacrifice. He urges us to give to support and sustain this community of faith which is vital to the well-being of many people within and beyond our walls.

When we give to Westminster, we insure that the teachings of Jesus will be taught and spread, and that homeless and hungry people will be housed and fed. When we give to Westminster, we insure that our secular culture of violence will be countered by a faith community of compassion; that our secular culture of exploitation will be countered by a faith community that strives for justice; and that our secular culture that promotes greed will be countered by a faith community that encourages generosity.

There is an old Arab proverb that says, "There are no pockets in a shroud." We cannot take our wealth with us, but we can use it during our lifetimes to reach people with the power and the grace of God.