**“The Sermon on the Amount”**

June 1, 2025 7th Sunday of Easter Text: Acts 2:37-47

Reed Baer West Parish of Barnstable

Our reading today comes from the New Testament, from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts tells of what happened after the followers of Jesus were, true to Jesus’ promises, filled with the Holy Spirit – filled with God’s spirit – and formed a new, life-transforming community, one that became to be known as the church. Reading from the second chapter…

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I.

 Today is Pledge Sunday, in a way the wind-up to the annual Stewardship Campaign. Your Stewardship Committee – church members Bruce Benwood, Mike Howard, Bob Stolte, Bob Wyman, and Roger Henson – have done a great job sharing with you their thoughts about the many and varied ways this faith community is working to pursue God’s dream for us, our community and the world beyond. All that made possible only through your generous and faithful financial support, the vast majority of which comes through pledges of financial support for the coming year.

 And so they have sent you letters. They have had folk deliver Stewardship Moments on Saturdays and Sundays this past month, with members of our congregation telling you about the ways our ministries have made a real difference in the life of this faith community, for our adults, youth and children, and for those who participate in our many small group offerings --- The Women in the Spirit group, the Men’s Breakfast Group, the Knitting Group, the Rooster Crows crafters, the Bible Study classes, the Senior Choir and Bell Choir, the special meals group, and so on. And they have shared with you how, through our giving to Outreach, we have impacted the wider community here on the Cape, nationally, and even in the world beyond.

 But the thing is, the Stewardship Committee is always looking for the pastors to put their thumbs on the proverbial scale, to close the deal. And so while Jesus is famous for his Sermon on the Mount, the Stewardship Committee turns to the pastor to deliver an equally persuasive Sermon on the Amount.

 The first Sunday after a medical leave. With next year’s budget hanging in the balance. Just do like Jesus. No pressure.

 So this, then, is my Sermon on the Amount.

As if I could do as well as the young couple we saw down on Bourbon Street in New Orleans a few years ago, where it seems like everyone has some sort of gimmick to pry money out of tourists’ wallets, busking on street corners, dressing up as mimes, juggling, you name it. The couple simply boldly strode down the Bourbon Street yelling “WE NEED MONEY.” You know it worked, else why would they do it?

As if I could do as well as the Rev. Nancy Taylor up at the historic Old South Church in Boston put it in her stewardship pitch, “GIVE US MONEY!”

You know the old saying, “Give until it hurts.” To quote a former president, “C’mon, man.” No, give until it feels good. A couple in this congregation decided a couple of years ago that they were so impressed by what this church is about and how it helps its members and the wider community that they wanted to help us get the word out more effectively, and so on top of their pledge they gave us $6000 to be solely dedicated to growth efforts. And when they saw what we did with that money, when they saw the fruit that this gift bore, the next year they repeated that gift.

And so, if this Sermon on the Amount has done its job, you will feel good about wanting to make a pledge of financial support to this church, and about increasing your giving to the point where you really feel good about it. And so I am going to go out on a limb here, and ask, “Can I get an amen?”

II.

 But that is not really what this Sermon on the Amount is all about.

 Many folk ask why they should join a church. They will say something like, “I don’t think of myself as religious, I think of myself as spiritual, and can’t I do that on the golf course or at home or on a walk at the beach?”

 Maybe so, and it is not my intent to debate the point today. But what I do want to do is share with you my experience over the past weeks, realizing that this may indeed be just one data point, one example, one solitary light in the darkness.

 As many of you know, from personal experience or from that of a family member or close friend, cancer treatment can be daunting, physically challenging, mentally stressful, scary. And it can be spiritually challenging.

 And so it was for this pastor, for this individual, for this patient undertaking a 28-day regime of radiation treatments up in Boston. I know that some folk believe that a pastor, someone is always going on about trusting God and not giving in to fear, has it all down and knows nothing of the cares and worries of the common man or woman. While that might be true of a better pastor than this one, believe me, that is not me.

 But the thing is, this was a journey I never walked alone. I was always surrounded by love and support, the vast majority of which came from this faith community.

 The love and support of Christie, who carried on here with both her job and then mine as well, and who still made the time to come up to Boston two nights a week to help me out.

 The love and support of church members who took care of our Golden Retreiver, Ida, so that Christie could make those overnights with me.

 The Deacons who supported Christie and recognizing that she needed some time off to rest, arranged for guest preachers on several weekends.

 The people like Marianne and Greg Williams, Rik and Sandy Clark and Lisa Fackler who came up and met me and took me to museums and out to a meal.

 The knitters who made a prayer shawl for me, the folk who sent up books and puzzles and Lego kits to distract me.

 All the folk, church members, children from the Family School, kids from Saturday School, the choirs, even the A.A. group, who showered me with cards, the old-fashioned kind that came in the mail with nice hand-written notes of care and concern. I displayed them on a bookcase in my room, a constant reminder of all you and your love.

 And all the prayers you surrounded me with. It meant the world to me that so many of you held me in prayer these past weeks.

 And so, as I am sure you can see, this is indeed a Sermon on the Amount. On the immeasurable, incalculable amount of love and care this church shared with me – and which I know is indicative of your character and part and parcel of what makes this a faithful church community.

 This has always been the hallmark of the faithful church dating back to its origins. Look at our reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The earliest church was marked by the way its members took care of each other, sharing out of what they had so that no one went hungry, so that everyone’s needs were met. They committed themselves to each other and their common life together, one joyous, celebratory, thankful community. And while this was in no way simply a growth strategy, that is in fact what happened – people on the outside looking in liked what they saw and flocked to join them. And the rest, as they say, is history.

 And so yes, this *is* a Sermon on the Amount, the amount of love and care and care that characterizes the church when it is really being the church of Jesus Christ. So again, can I get an amen?

III.

 But that, at bottom, is not really what this Sermon the Amount is all about. It is not really about the amount of your support of our ministries here, or about the amount of love and care you share. It is really about what over and above all this lies, the amount of God’s love for you and all creation.

 The Bible speaks powerfully and repeatedly about how much God loves us.

God’s love is not limited, it is unfailing and everlasting. As we read in Jeremiah 31:3, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”*

God’s love is not abstract, it is personal and intimate and was with each of us before we were born: *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*(Psalm 139:13-14)

God’s love is sacrificial, coming to us and taking on our human form to save us: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

And nothing can separate us from God’s love, as we read in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,
*“For I am convinced that neither death nor life… nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*(Romans 8:38-39)

To close this Sermon on the Amount, what is the amount of God’s love for you, for me, for this church, for this world? It is vast, it is eternal, and it is unshakeable, and so we can live with hope, with joy, with purpose, and with gratitude. May our living, and may our giving, joyfully reflect our gratitude for God’s undying love for us. Amen?

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