

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Acts 2:40-47

Sermon Title: "Cut to the Heart and Ready to Give" (A Sermon on the Amount)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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{SLIDE 1} I listen to public radio. These are the radio stations that are funded by listeners "like you," they tell me. Every year, around October, they begin their pledge drives. Every year the station I listen to wants me to empty my pockets and give to their broadcasting.

I don't particularly like pledge drive season on the radio. These people can be on the air and talk about the same thing over and over again. "You give of \$10 per month will allow you to blah blah blah..." "If you drink a Starbucks coffee every day, you spend money for something that only lasts for a half hour or so. But when you pledge to this radio station, your money helps to fund our wonderful programs that last forever." The people talking to me repeat the same thing over and over again: the phone number we must call, the amount they are looking for for the next hour, the story about the little old lady who gave \$50 and has listened to the station since she was inside her mother's womb.

And then, they get certain radio personalities like Ira Glass or Alec Baldwin to shame listeners into

sending money to public radio. Alec Baldwin will put on a funny skit or two about the great benefits of public radio and how our souls are eternally damned for not giving. This fellow Ira Glass will call certain people and ask embarrassing about what they do not give. He will not get off the phone until he gets a commitment from the person. I hope Ira never calls me.

But why do public radio and TV stations put on pledge drives? Is it to annoy the heck out of us for two weeks or more? Is it to embarrass us? Or, is it because they know people want to give. There are people who thoroughly enjoy listening to their stations. The little old lady who gave \$50 and the young professional who gives \$10 a month: these people appreciate turning on their radios and finding the news they need and the music they adore. They cannot find any entertainment like it on any other station, so they want to make sure their favorite station stay around for a long time. They believe in what public radio is doing and want to support it with their purses and wallets.

{SLIDE 2} People will hand over money to the things they believe in. If they enjoy it and want to see it around for a long time, they will give some money toward it. Fans of Cirque Du Soleil, for example, will

go to every show that comes to town, because they loved the last show they saw. They believe the performers will always dazzle them with their acrobatics, and so the next show certainly will not disappoint. People become members of museums and art galleries, because they love the exhibits that such places display. They love it when special exhibits are put up for a month or so that highlight a certain famous painter like Salvador Dali or Andy Warhol, or teach people about science such as how plants and animals are able to glow in the dark.

“People want to make the world a better place to live. They want to believe that they can truly make a difference for the better... [People] want to be a part of something that *changes* lives.”¹ People express themselves sometimes by giving money to something they believe in.

{SLIDE 3} People may even give to the church, because they want to be a part of something that changes lives.

Look at what people are doing in Acts 2:44-45: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

¹ J. Clif Christopher, *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate: A New Vision for Financial Stewardship*, 13.

Holy smokes, what is going on here? People are selling their possessions and goods, meaning they are putting up their trinkets and normal household items for sale. They are selling their property for cash as well. What do they do with the cash? Do they spent it on nicer things for themselves? Do they put down payments on large property on which to retire? No, they give the money to the church, as any have need. These are not rich people we are talking about who may have disposable income. A millionaire could give \$100,000 away but still have \$900,000 to play with. We aren't talking about people will big buck in these verses – we are talking about normal people. People who have enough to live on. People who may not have enough to live on. They believe so much in their church that they are willing to give what they can to keep it going. They give as others have need. Together they believe in what they are doing. Together they share all things in common. No one is better or more important than another. They share, and lives are changed.

{SLIDE 4} But what has compelled people to sell their possessions and goods? People don't just do this unless something has touched their hearts so profoundly as to make them sell their stuff and give the profits away. Something so powerful has changed their hearts and minds forever.

The verses we read today come after the fires of Pentecost have landed on the disciples, changing their language and their courses of ministry. People are amazed by the change in these followers of Jesus Christ.² How could men who spoke one or two languages now speak many more, and languages they never formally studied. While these people are amazed, of course there are the detractors (critics) who say that these men are obviously drunk.³

And then Peter stands up and give the speech of his life. Well, at least one of the best speeches of his life. He stands up and tells a great story. Everybody loves a great story. This is why many of us love to hear Bible stories because they are great tales filled with sadness and joy, desperation and hope.⁴ Peter talks about the age of fulfillment, or in layman terms the coming of the kingdom of God.⁵ Everybody was waiting for God's kingdom to arrive and save them from occupation and oppression. It has now arrived, Peter tells everyone. It is here through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was more than a good teacher. He is our Messiah, our Christ, the Savior of the world. Now he has got everyone's attention. They see the disciples speaking

² Cf. Acts 2:7-12.

³ Cf. Acts 2:13.

⁴ William H. Willimon, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts*, cf. 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

different languages, all proclaimed that God's kingdom is here through faith in Christ. "Tell us more!" the crowds say.

Peter continues with his great story. By virtue of his resurrection Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God. He is now judge over all the earth and universe. Just like the sheep and goats that Jesus talked about in Mathew 25, Jesus will look to those who have been faithful to him, who have visited the poor and weak and hopeless; and he will welcome them to his kingdom forever. The Holy Spirit is moving through us right now, Peter says, telling us that this all is true. See how these followers of Jesus are now speaking different languages, ready to visit the corners of the world to share God's news of salvation.

The kingdom of God is here. Jesus is the Judge and Savior who rules over this kingdom. Ministry is coming to many believers through the work of the Holy Spirit. Now the crowd is really on their feet. In Acts 2:37, it says they are "cut to the heart," meaning that the words have entered the very core of their being. The words convince them – the words agitate them – the words call them to action. They love hearing this story, which will take them from hopelessness to possibility, from oppression to freedom. Everybody loves a good story.

The people hearing this story do not want it to end.

“What must we do now?” they ask. “What is the next step to keep this story going on and on and on?” Peter says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁶

{SLIDE 5} That has done it. The people are hooked. They want what Peter has. They want what those disciples speaking different languages have. They want to know Jesus Christ in a profound way. They take action. In our passage for today, we see people going nuts over the good news of Jesus Christ. They are baptized, 3000 in one day. They are eager to devote themselves to this cause of making God’s kingdom a solid reality in the world. They devote themselves to the disciples’ teachings, meaning they hold Life Groups and Sunday Schools, Women’s Groups and Men’s Groups and Youth Groups. They talk about everything the disciples have learned about Jesus, and they too become disciples. They devote themselves to fellowship, meaning they continually come together to support one another, to teach one another. They are all equal to each other under the banner of Christ. They don’t see old and young, poor or rich. They don’t see different shades of skin color or

⁶ Acts 2:37-38.

different heights or weights. They are devoted to each other under Christ, making a difference in the world for God's kingdom. They devote themselves to breaking of bread, meaning they share meals together, making sure nobody goes hungry. They even celebrate the Lord's Supper, remember what Christ did for them, and what Christ continue to do through the Spirit. "Eating together is a mark of unity, solidarity, and deep friendship..."⁷ They devote themselves to prayers, meaning they constantly seek the will of God for their gathering and for the work. They get their marching orders through their prayers, and through prayer they gain courage and strength to spread that good news of salvation.

{SLIDE 6} They are cut to the heart. Peter's message of salvation is transforming them. Faith in Christ is becoming a part of their DNA. They give everything they can to make a difference in the world through faith in Christ. They even devote their money to this cause. They sell their things and reap profits, believing it will cause transformation in people's hearts.⁸

As we said before, people "want to make the world a better place to live. They want to believe that they

⁷ Willimon, *Acts*, 41.

⁸ Cf. Acts 2:45.

can truly make a difference for the better.”⁹ They give of their time to something. They give of their talents. And they give of their money, which is a personal, intimate thing they do to make a difference for others. They are cut to the heart to give everything they can, taking that extra step to put funds toward something to keep it going, and lives are changed.

One hard reality in this world is that it takes money to keep most things going. It takes some sort of income to keep businesses, households, charities, and churches doing what they do best. The people in the Book of Acts understood that, even then, there had to be a collection of tithes to allow the teaching, the fellowship, and the worship going. Our church is no different. We have wonderful ministries to carry out. We have wonderful talent that reaches out to adult and youth and children, sharing with them the message of salvation. We also have the third leg of the stool, so to speak: the tithes. And we have wonderful tithing that takes place here to make sure we constantly have ministry happening.

We could have just the time and talent, but without that third piece of tithing, the other two fail. Children and youth ministries suffer and fade away. The Food Pantry goes belly up. There would be no

⁹ Christopher, *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate*, 13.

chance of putting on another excellent VBS that reaches 70, 80, 90 children in our community. There is not enough to keep the lights on, so we may have Women's Group, Life Group, Sunday School, Cubs and Boys Scouts, Session and Team meeting, just to name a few. The tithes we offer are just as important as the time and talents we offer. The church in Acts knew this, and so should we.

{SLIDE 7} We are cut to the heart about our church. We want to make a difference, and we make a difference when we commit to all the ministries our church carries out. We have heard the message of salvation, and we want to hear more. We are convinced that Christ is Lord and will care for us in this life and the next, and we want others to know about Christ, too. We would like others to join us in this adventure called faith, so that together we may know God more deeply. We believe in what we are doing. We have strong confidence in what God has called us to do, and we do it with joy and thanksgiving. We will make sure Morrow Church stays around with our devotion to teaching and learning, fellowship and worship and prayer, and our devotion to tithing. We do make a difference when we give to this community. We will always make a difference by our giving, and lives will be changed.

The Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the good news! Who is in the position to condemn us? Only Jesus Christ is, and he died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ reigns in power for us. Christ intercedes for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Friends, believe the gospel: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.