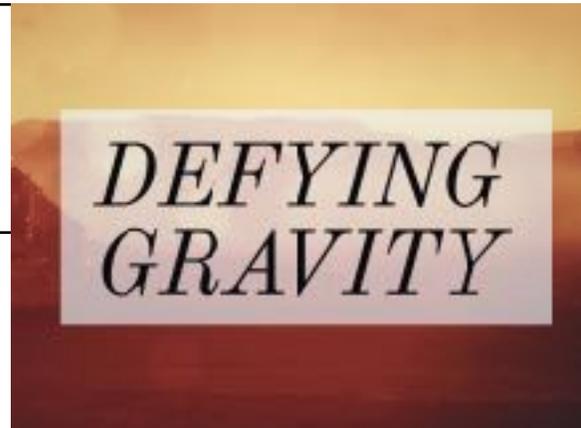

Graphics and Audio Notes

- There **will** be a sermon starter video.
- There **will** be notes and / or scripture to show on screen during the sermon.



Key Questions

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about how we can begin to break free from the reality of financial gravity in our lives.

Why is this sermon important?

It is important because financial gravity can weigh heavily on us and prevent us from living the life that God has in mind for us.

What is the context of this sermon?

This series and sermon is adapted from Defying Gravity resources from Tom Berlin published through Abingdon Press. It is preached on the first Sunday returning to the pulpit after the death of my father, Mark Conard.

What are the next action steps?

Live as a steward of all that we have, from our possessions and money to our time and abilities. Defy financial gravity and live life faithfully employed in God's service.

What is the good news? What is the bottom line?

The good news is that, whether your tithe fits in a mason jar or a charitable trust, you can experience the joy of generosity.

Metadata

Topics

- Change Lives
- Give

Sermon Books of the Bible

- Luke

Tags

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, Eldorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference,

24th Sunday after Pentecost
Defying Gravity - Breaking Free
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado
Text Online at <http://bit.ly/2dn1Khw>

October 30, 2016
Luke 15:11-13
Preaching Target Word Count: 1,928
Audio Online at <http://bit.ly/2f6ouDO>
Video Online at <http://bit.ly/2fvogpX>

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Conclusion

11

Generosity Changes Us

Good News

Call to Action

Annual Giving Commitment

Invitation

I'm sorry. Thank you. Please.

Ready to pray

Not ready to pray

Closing

Closing Prayer

Luke 15:11-13, CEB

¹¹Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. ¹²The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. ¹³Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

Response to Scripture

One: The word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God.

Introduction

Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

Listen for God's Word

I invite you to listen for God's word today.

Place for Notes

You can find a place in your bulletin to take notes or, if you prefer, in the event for this worship service in the Bible app on your mobile device

Tool for Spiritual Growth

When you learn something new, have a question, make a connection with your life or hear anything that will help you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ as you worship, grow, give, serve and share, write it down.

Then, use these notes as a tool to help you grow in your faith in the days ahead.

Prayer

Will you pray with me?

O God, use these words to speak good news, so that, as individuals and as a congregation, we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you, and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Opening Story - Weightless Hoax

In January last year, social media posts began to circulate this message:

(NASA) January 4th, 9:47 AM PST, the long awaited planetary alignment will cause a gravitational fluctuation that will leave you weightless for a short period of time #beready

The story was that British astronomer Patrick Moore predicted that on that morning, an extraordinary astronomical event would occur. At exactly 9:47 a.m., the

planet Pluto would pass directly behind Jupiter, in relation to the Earth. This rare alignment would mean that the combined gravitational force of the two planets would exert a stronger upward gravitational pull, temporarily counteracting the Earth's own gravity and making people weigh less.

The story added that people could experience the phenomenon by jumping in the air at the precise moment the alignment occurred. If they did so, Moore promised, they would experience a strange floating sensation. People all over the world lofted themselves into the air at 9:47 a.m., only to discover that they could not escape Earth's gravity so easily. It was a hoax. Ever since Sir Isaac Newton identified what made apples fall to the ground, we have known that gravity is a consistent and unfailing force. It is ordering our world right now.

Financial Gravity

During this series, I want to help you see that there is another force that is working around us all the time. Just as gravity exists in the natural world, financial gravity exists in the economic world in which you and I live each day. Financial gravity is generated by the culture and economy in which we live, and, like Earth's gravity, it is necessary for our existence. Every human being has certain needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. Like the hunter-gatherers of old, we have to procure these things for ourselves and those we love.

Impact of Financial Gravity

Problems with financial gravity arise when that force is felt with such intensity that it begins to control us. You notice financial gravity when go on the internet and see ads posted for items that are magically in the styles and colors you like. Walk through a shopping district and something tries to pull you inside each time you pass a store.

The impact of financial gravity can be measured when you examine your bank account, noting that the balance is lower than you hoped, or when your credit card bill is higher than you would like.

Video Example: Harness Video

The key to financial gravity is to experience the force in just the right proportion. We have a video that helps illustrate. Let's take a look...

Plan "2016-10-30 Sermon 2 - Harness Video"

Video: Stacking weights on training sled

Force of Needs

We have needs that we have to address in our lives. You have to feed yourself and others, you have to provide shelter, probably a car for transportation. Those are like these weights being put on this training sled.

Video: Clipping in to training sled and running

We yoke our lives to those needs. We have to generate enough income that can pull those things. We all have needs that we have to provide for. That's part of this. These are good things. In the right proportion, we can do that every single day, be economically healthy and wise.

The problem is when we confuse needs with wants.

Video: Stacking more weights on training sled

Force of Wants

Pretty soon the car needs to be bigger and nicer, we need a bigger house, we are going to eat out not just once or twice but several times a month. Our kids want more and we give it to them. The possessions in our home stack up and we need special containers.

Video: Strapping in to training sled

Then we find that when we yoke ourself to our economic life no longer feels like something healthy we can pull. It feels like an absolute challenge. The challenge that you are experiencing is what we're calling economic gravity. The pull, the weight, the mass of those needs and wants, now combined is more than many of us can pull. The effect is felt almost instantly.

People aren't as light as they used to be, not as joyful as they used to be. They don't feel economic freedom anymore. They feel enslaved to their economics and it makes everything harder.

Transition

This is financial gravity.

We feel it with our needs.

We feel it with our wants.

Now, let's talk a closer look at the power of financial gravity in the story of scripture for today.

Pursuing the Kingdom of Self

These verses are part of the story of a rich young man who appears in the Gospels. He is a character in a parable Jesus told about a loving father. He is the younger of two sons who feels financial gravity with such force that he goes to his father and asks for his inheritance early. You can imagine how the family would react to the younger son's wish.

Parables often place people in peculiar scenarios to make their point clear. This young man wanted to pursue fully the kingdom of self. He must have felt incredible as he set his course and began to experience the pull of a distant land. Having spent his life in a fairly confined space, he was excited to begin a great adventure. What he didn't know was that he was about to be sucked into a black hole.

Example: Black Holes

A black hole is a place in space where the gravity is so great that nothing can escape its pull, not even light, which is why black holes can be felt but not seen. Once something enters the gravitational field of a black hole, the effect is dramatic. The kingdom of self is a space full of black holes.

For many people, money and the things it buys can produce a level of gravity from which they simply cannot escape. One of the worst combinations in this regard is to place a large sum of money in the hands of a person with low spiritual and emotional maturity. This is exactly what happened to the young man in the parable.

Extravagant Living

His spending choices were predictable. Hear these words from Luke 15:13:

“Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.”¹

Most of us understand the problem faced by the young man. He was anxious to be independent, but he was immature, and immature people have trouble handling money. His vision was limited to a brief few hours into the future. His impulse control was so weak that all options for how to spend Daddy's money looked equally inviting. He lived fast and large until it was all gone, and then stumbled away in regret when a famine picked the last denarius from his pocket.

Example: Money like a Granite Boulder or Pile of Sand

Have you ever noticed how a large sum of money seems like a granite boulder that will withstand time, until you discover it's more like sand on a barrier island that's quickly removed by tides or washed out overnight by a nor'easter?

Young Man Returns Home

The once-rich but then very poor young man in Jesus' parable eventually returned home. He knew he deserved his father's wrath, but he was hungry and desperate, so he decided to ask his dad for a job on the estate.

As he walked up the familiar road home, he was amazed when he saw the old man running toward him. It was beneath the dignity of an older man in Israel to run anywhere, much less toward a son who had brought shame to the family. The son must have taken this as a sign of bad things to come:

¹ Luke 15:13, CEB

Wow, if he's running toward me, he must really be angry.

Self-defense may have occurred to him; it is certain that his father's grace did not.

Father's Generous Spirit

That was the day the son learned about the father's generous spirit. The father restored him to the household and put a signet ring on his finger. He was given a new robe to wear. It was kindness he did not deserve, forgiveness he did not merit, and love that he did not anticipate. His father's generosity gave him a new life.

Change of Son's Character

Think of how that experience must have changed the son's character.

The selfish boy died in the distant land; a new man was resurrected in his place through his father's love. We can imagine that, rather than thinking about himself, he now looked to the needs of others. Extravagant living in some distant land would no longer appeal to him. Being with his father, enjoying the company of his father, doing the will of his father would be what now brought him joy. He would be kinder and more gracious.

Most important of all, rather than simply being a recipient of his father's generosity, he now possessed the insight to become a participant in it. Just as the pull of financial gravity was evident in the prodigal's life, so we can see it in our own.

Pull of Financial Gravity in Our Life

Often, our prayers to God are about things we hope to receive. We ask for guidance to make decisions, good health and recovery from illness, comfort for the bereaved, jobs and money to pay bills, healing in relationships, along with countless other requests. Our desire, regardless of how well intended, is often to acquire or receive from God rather than to serve God.

I wonder, how many times do we as individuals or small groups pray about how we can reach those who do not know Christ, feed the hungry, comfort those who mourn, assist the physically or mentally ill, house the homeless, gain access to prisoners, or provide needed services such as job training?

From my observation, the ratio of "receive" prayers to "serve" prayers is high.

Beneficiary to Participant in God's Kingdom

There is a moment of clarity for disciples of Jesus when we recognize the difference between being a beneficiary of God's kingdom and being a participant in God's kingdom. When you find yourself submitting your kingdom of self to the kingdom of God, good things begin to happen.

This orientation toward God's kingdom is life-altering. It creates an identity founded in generosity. Generous people see themselves, their lives, and their purpose

differently than people whose lives are weighed down by financial gravity. Generous people are more interested in what they can give than in what they will get.

Becoming Stewards

We become stewards. A steward is a person who manages another's property. Stewards have broad discretionary powers over how an account is managed or how a household is run, but they know that primarily they are servants, looking not to their self-interest but to the welfare of the owner.

Disciples of Jesus understand they are stewards of a gift given to them by God—a life with unique strengths, talents, abilities, and resources to use in ways guided by God's own Spirit that lives within them, so as to honor and glorify the giver of the gift.

Lack of Generosity - Owner not Steward

Sadly, most Christians do not truly act as God's stewards, and there is a reason for it. Financial gravity pulls us toward a deep belief that we are the sole owners of what we possess and that we can use it to support the lifestyle we desire. Being an owner means we can make decisions free of the control and even the consideration of others. We submit to no one when financial gravity holds us back.

Lack of generosity is not about resources; it is about identity. Stewards understand that they are custodial agents of whatever sum they administer. They manage money and assets with the thought of pleasing the true owner.

Proportional Giving

In order to become a steward of financial resources, one has to accept the challenge to set aside an amount of money to invest in the work of God's kingdom. Many Christians, as a way to get serious about their desire to participate in God's work, pursue generosity through proportional giving to their income with a tithe as the goal. A tithe is one-tenth of one's income. For these Christians, a tithe is the first and best of what they have, not the last or what is left over.

Practice of the Tithe

The tithe was a practice God gave the people of Israel. The money from the tithe was used to support the worship life of Israel and to take care of the most vulnerable people in the society.

Why would God ask them to do this? It's not as if the Almighty is short of money or has lost the power to create it. Clearly God is not in need of the tithe. It is possible that the tithe is requested not for God's sake, but for ours.

Discipline of the Tithe = Identity as Stewards

It seems clear that the tithe is intended to be a discipline that enables people to help expand God's kingdom. As they give their tithe, they become God's servants. Through their generosity, they gain a sense of identity. The practice of proportional giving calls them to offer their best for God's kingdom as a way to live into their identity as stewards.

Conclusion

Generosity Changes Us

How does the practice of generosity change us?

I want to share with you the story of a woman in a congregation not so different than ours. She was known as Ms. Margaret. She was in her early nineties when she was sitting with her pastor and the topic of giving came up. Ms. Margaret talked about how important giving was to her life and the joy she found in giving a tithe.

Let's take a look...

(Show "Sermon Video 2: Ms. Margaret.")

Generosity was at the center of her life.

Ms. Margaret shaped the life of her family through generosity.

Good News

The good news is that, whether your tithe fits in a mason jar or a charitable trust, you can experience the joy of generosity.

Call to Action

The only way to gain this type of joy is to take on her practice. As Christians, we are called to be stewards of all that we have, from our possessions and money to our time and abilities. As stewards, we can defy financial gravity and live our lives faithfully employed in God's service.

Annual Giving Commitment

On November 13, you will have the opportunity to make an annual giving commitment to support God's work through this church. What percentage of your income is God calling you to give in the year ahead? Ask God for wisdom in the use of money.

Invitation

It doesn't matter who you are, what you have done in the past or how you are living. Just like the son in the parable who returned to his father and finds a generous welcome, we can return to God and experience God's forgiveness and love.

All you have to do is turn back to God.

I'm sorry. Thank you. Please.

You can do that with a simple prayer – I am sorry. Thank you. Please.

Ready to pray

And, if you would like to pray, you are welcome to pray with me.

You do not have to pray it out loud, but just quietly under your breath.

In just a moment, you can repeat after me.

Not ready to pray

You may not be sure if you want to pray a prayer like that and that's okay.
No problem – you don't have to.

Closing

If you would like to turn back to God and say "Yes" to Jesus, you can.
God is with us.
Jesus is alive.
You can follow him today.

Will you pray with me?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, I am sorry for all the times in my life when I mess up.

And if anything comes to mind, ask God's forgiveness.

Forgive me of my sin and all that I know is wrong.
Thank you that you died on the cross and rose for me.
Please fill me with your Spirit and help me to follow you.
In your holy name, Amen.