



October 29, 2006

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

1 Peter 4:7-12

“Who is your money for?”

I have heard Christians say, “If I’m not supposed to be wealthy, why has God blessed me with so much: a business that has prospered, abilities that afford me a high salary?”

I’ve heard other American Christians say, “You know, I’m not wealthy at all; what would make you think that?”

Today, friends, I’m going to propose an answer to each of these questions. First, if you are an average middle class citizen of this country, you are wealthy. In this world at least 9 out of 10 persons have less than you do, materially. Sorry, that’s just the truth.

Second, God doesn’t say we’re none of us supposed to be wealthy, but he does say a LOT about how we’re supposed to handle our wealth. The Bible tells us there are GOOD CHANCES God has blessed us with wealth and goods that are FOR SOMEONE ELSE! Our job is to ask, “Who am I holding your money for, God?”

The Epistle reading for today provides some words on this point:

Love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless—cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it.

Most of us are pretty clear on the concept that following Jesus means we are called to LOVE- love God, love our neighbors. But we may not make the transition this Scripture makes. The reading clearly says, “Love”. But it immediately provides us examples of what love is, what it looks like- and Christian love means cheerful giving

to others—being generous- passing around what God gives us so EVERYONE GETS IN ON IT.

Friends, in our world, everyone is not getting in on what God has provided. When we ask, “Who is my money for, God?” God replies, “Oh, some of it’s for you! But some of it I gave you to pass on to someone else.” I believe the “someone else” important to God is often someone viewed as unimportant by the world. A prime example of this would be the youth and children of the world.

In the United States many statistics bear this out. The U.S. Census Bureau alerts us to the unacceptable reality that 8 million children in this country have no health insurance. In 2003 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that 900,000 children were determined to have been neglected or abused. Jonathan Kozol, the author of one of the books read by a group last summer, describes our public school situation as a “national horror hidden in plain view. 1.5 million children in the United States have at least one parent in prison.

This does not begin to touch statistics of children in peril across the globe- children orphaned by AIDS, children orphaned and homeless from tsunamis and hurricanes and war.

Our faith teaches us in clear and certain terms that everything we have and are comes from God. We are MANAGERS (Stewards) of what is God’s. We are stewards of the earth, we are stewards of our lives, we are stewards of abilities and money. Some of what we manage has been given us by God for OTHERS. God intends us to manage carefully and wisely FOR THE VULNERABLE, FRAGILE AND POWERLESS people in the world. They need God’s faithful to serve as stewards for THEM.

The money I possess is not all for me.
The money you possess is not all for you.

Think about it this way:

You have one cherished sister who lives out of state with her husband of 15 years and their four children. A dark day arrives. Your sister and her husband are both killed in a car accident. But one blessing remains: the children were not with them- they are all fine. As the family gathers, services are held, and the will is read. Your sister and her husband asked the paternal grandparents, who live in the same town as the children, to become their guardians, in the event of both parents’ death. So, the kids, ages 6, 9, 10 and 13 are moved and settle in. They are close to their grandparents, they have friends in their church and community, and are able to continue to attend their own schools. But—your sister and her husband have named YOU to hold the money that is for the children. There was life insurance, there are college funds. There is money to care for them even as they grow up with their grandparents. You have money which is not

yours. You are managing money for someone else. You are managing money for vulnerable, precious children.

Now, how would you THINK about that money? How readily might you dip into it for yourself? How likely would you be to “borrow” from those funds? I think that money would be SACRED to you—it’s for your nieces and nephews, and you would manage it with GREAT care.

I am convinced this is the truth of ALL money we hold. It’s GOD’S money, and he has given much of it to us for our own use. According to Biblical standards 90% of what we have is for our own use. But THE REST OF IT IS NOT FOR US. Some of it is to help children and youth grow up healthy and loved, to grow up hearing the message of God’s love.

Churches need to make the kids and youth of their church and community a priority. We are moving that direction in this church. We have two presentations this morning from church leaders working with children and youth. They are ready to share with us some of their plans for the coming year. The money to minister in these ways is in your pockets and purses. As you give to the church’s operating budget, ministry is made possible.

(Invite Gina Armstrong, and Rich French)

We are also called to care about children beyond our community. Today is our last call for donations to the Redbird Mission School Bus in Kentucky. Your giving is going to run one school bus several days this year. The kids who live in the mountains and the hollers of Kentucky are precious to God. Vic Temple has provided us information about global child sponsorship through Compassion International. Pick up a brochure from the cabinet next to the Cedar Avenue door when you leave today.

Giving does not DEplete us! It nourishes us. That’s the lesson of Desert Pete, who calls us to pour forth what we have into the pump of life. When we prime the pump, water flows in abundance- enough for ourselves, and enough to fill the bottle for others. Show how you intend to be a part of Christ’s work in the year ahead by making an estimate of your giving for 2007. Ask God, “Who is this money of yours for, Lord?” and give heed to his answer! Amen. Amen.