

"CERTAINTY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES"

Joshua 1:6-9

There used to be a saying that the only certain things in this life were paying taxes and dying. And the more I think about it, you could, you could opt out of paying taxes- there might be consequences down the road, but it is possible. For instance, I was doing some research about this and I found that as an ordained clergyperson of the United Methodist Church, you may qualify for the Social Security Self-Employment Tax Exemption if:

- 1) You are conscientiously opposed to public insurance because of your individual religious considerations (not because of your general conscience); or 2) you are opposed because of the principles of your religious denomination.

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the United Methodist Church goes on to say that, (quote) "while it may seem appealing to avoid paying Social Security taxes today to reap tax savings, doing so means you

will ultimately be reaching into tomorrow's pocket of retirement benefits—
creating a loss down the line that may result in inadequate income and
health coverage in your retirement years. For this reason, The UMC strongly
urges you **to pay** Social Security taxes.” (end quote) But it is an option.

It is not an understatement to say that these are uncertain times- with
yesterday's *Akron Beacon Journal* reporting that the U.S unemployment rate
was 10.2% in October, in Ohio it was 10.5%; people losing a substantial %
of their investments due to the world-wide economic crisis. There are
younger people trying to find work only to be competing with older adults
who are trying to make ends meet. There is uncertainty everywhere. Why
there are those who are wondering if Cleveland Browns head coach, Eric
Mangini will be coaching the Browns next season. I mean already this past
week, the head coach of the Buffalo Bills, Dick Jauron, was fired after a 3
and 6 record. The certainty is that these two coaches have a contract so

they will get paid, but coaching next year? Jauron is out and Mangini might not be too far behind.

Today is Stewardship Dedication Sunday when you have the opportunity to come forward and place your 2010 pledge card in a basket on the Communion Table after this sermon. As I told you last Sunday, and I want to share it again, the Elders and Deacons, the Leadership of our church and Pastor have all turned in their pledges as of last Sunday and I will be bringing those pledges forward and placing them on the Communion Table. Churches all over are engaging in the fall stewardship campaigns encouraging their people to prayerfully consider what they will return to Christ and His Church this coming year. And that is not an easy task given the hard economic times today. And yet the work of Christ must go on, the work of our church must go on.

I always find it interesting when people make comments about churches "always asking for money." Some certainly might do it more than

others and yet Jesus talked about money. As a matter of fact, 1/6 of the Gospels, and 1/3 of the parables address the subject of stewardship.

Now it is true, Jesus was no fund-raiser. He dealt with money matters, why?

Well, because money matters. It really is a surprise to many people, including Christians that the Bible has so much to say on this subject.

I found the following article but not attributed to anyone so I cannot give it authorship. Nevertheless here goes: "God has given us three ways on this earth to invest in eternity. Two of them are up for discussion and we approach them with open-mindedness, we can never seem to hear enough about them, but the third seems to be nobody's business. [Way #1] 1) The preacher who fails to address *time* and how we spend it is considered derelict in his duty. For time is one of those irretrievable values in life you can only spend once and never capture again. [Way #2] 2) The pastor who overlooks teaching on *talents* and gifts that help the church body function smoothly and well and even efficiently is not doing his job.

The congregation has a right to feel slighted because that subject is not mentioned. [Way #3] 3) But let the man address the subject of *treasure* and he's back on that age-old subject and just trying to get our money. I find that... amazing...." (Author unknown)

The returning to God whatever portion we determine is truly a personal issue but it is also first and foremost a spiritual issue. When you think about it, stewardship is not about the church's need to receive but rather stewardship is first about the individual's need to give. Friends, let's be honest, don't you get tired of the stewardship pitch that begins with the church standing there hat-in-hand. What we need to be speaking of is joy, grace, and the individual benefits of disciplined generosity. And that stewardship is an act of personal spiritual devotion that yes, will benefit the church, but even more than that starts first to benefit the believer. Folks, Christian stewardship is all about the joyous discipline of giving thanks to God with the way we live out our lives and the way we spend our money and

the way we share our money. And our Christian stewardship needs to involve our evaluation of our own lifestyle, what we have accumulated, how we manage our finances, our values, our faith, and our sharing of what God has blessed us with. This is about growing and maturing in our faith and as we grow and mature in our discipleship our stewardship is an issue that needs to be reckoned with. Friends, we should be like Jesus who talked about stewardship pretty often and not feel that we can only talk about it in the fall, in November, right before Thanksgiving. Stewardship is a life-style and no matter what your socio-economic situation is we all can come to the party. Great and small, rich and poor, CEO and the school crossing guard. We all can give.

Dick Hillebrand, the chairman of our Stewardship and Finance Team wrote a letter that went out last weekend and was hopefully received by most of you this week.

He referred to our scripture passage today and compared the uncertain times to the people of Israel who were preparing to cross over the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land to us as a church in transition. People of our church are working to determine what Ministry could and should look like in this Middlebury area where the church is located. They are also beginning to think about a continued worshiping community in this area. There is also a group exploring where a new worshiping community could move to in an area with growth potential. So it becomes two ministry opportunities for our church in two areas. That is a very large undertaking to address. And yet when I read our passage today it is full of hope, full of promises; words that can inspire and give one inspiration and encouragement. For just as the Israelites were ready to embark on a new adventure, so are we, as a church. And if there is one point I would want us to take home with us today it is this: **Claim God's prosperity and success**. That is what we read in the second part of verse 8 where it says, "For then you shall make your way

prosperous, and then you shall be successful.” But there is something the children of Israel must do for this to become a reality. Look back to verse 7 and the first part of verse 8. For it says, “Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it.” So there are some key things they must do in order to get. There are three conditions: **Condition One: Study the Scriptures**. “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night.” It is crucial for us to be in this book. I wonder how many mistakes I have made, more than I care to count, all because I tried to find God’s will for my life without going to the Book. I wonder how much pain I have experienced because I did not go to this Book.

This Book is the "Guide Book" to life and it has stood the test of time and it is a road map for how we should live or not live because it is full of examples of success and failures.

Condition Two: Obey God. Verse 7 says, "Being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or the left, so that you may be successful."

When I am being disobedient to God it shows up and I know it and I feel it.

Nothing catastrophic has happened but it has an effect. Maybe you can identify with what I am saying and maybe you too have experienced a

lifestyle of unfulfilled promise when disobedience is evident. The scriptures are full of stories of people who are disobedient and the consequences. But

the scriptures are full of the amazing grace of God and the fact that it is never too late to come back and be renewed by the power of God.

Which leads to **Condition Three: Be strong and very courageous.**

Friends, when we have met the conditions of studying the Scriptures and obeying the Lord, then we have the right to live without fear.

God promised to be with the people of Israel and He promises to be with us- as individuals in whatever the situation and whatever the circumstances. And God promises to be with us financially as a church, knowing that this is God's church, it is God's ministries and if there is one thing I have learned from Rita Vincent our Director of Emergency Assistance it is that God will provide and God will find a way. God promises to be with us individually and as a church. If we but keep our eyes and minds in this Book- the Bible, if we but trust and obey in a God who has provided for us in the past and will in the future; if we but stay focused and be strong and courageous there is nothing that, together with God, we cannot do. This is Christ's church and He will not let us down if we but remain faithful and follow. Amen.

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Joshua 1:1-9

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Uncertain times:

Jobless rate was 10.2% in October,...

Stewardship Dedication Sunday

People make comments about churches "always asking for money"

1/6 of the Gospels and 1/3 of the parables address the subject of Stewardship

Jesus was no fund-raiser but He dealt with money matters, why?

The returning to God whatever portion we determine is a personal issue but it is first and foremost a spiritual issue

Joshua 1:1-9

Just as the Israelites were ready to embark on a new adventure, so are we, as a church

A point to take home with us today: **Claim God's _____ and _____** verse 8

What the children of Israel must do for this to become a reality is found in verse 7 and the first part of verse 8

Three conditions:

Condition One: Study the _____ verse 8

Condition Two: _____ God verse 7

Condition Three: Be _____ and _____ verse 9

Conclusion: This is Christ's church and He will not let us down if we but remain faithful and follow.