

“Inflation & the Cycle of Blessings: The Currency of Money”
Luke 8:1-3

The currency of money more than any other currency produces a lot of anxiety for people. Our old fears and cultural assumptions and stories about money often go unexamined and as a result end up blocking the flow of the cycle of blessings in our lives and in our world. Think of some of the sayings we learn as children:

- Money doesn't grow on trees
- Money is the root of all evil
- You need money to make money
- Wanna see how people are, wait till money is involved

Most of the time, when children hear about money, it is in a negative context instead of seeing it as part of the flow of blessings. Today, we are going to consider how money can be an essential part of the flow of blessings. Eric Law often invites groups to do this exercise together: Recall an earlier time in your life when money was flowing in a way that gave blessings. It could be a story or experience in which your parents, or relatives, or friends, or elders had used money in a way that develops relationships, tells the truth, creates wellness, or builds up the community.

Money does not have to be negative. What is negative is the way we attach so much of our fears and hopes to it while forgetting that it is a tool that can help us with the flow of blessings in the world.

In our Bible story for today, we look at one of the examples of how the ministry of Jesus was funded. Jesus and his disciples travelled and taught for about three years. They relied on the hospitality of people along the way, but they also relied on generous donors.

Let's listen to Luke 8:1-3

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ² as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

These women had received the gift of Christ's love and care and in thanksgiving and joy they wanted to support his ministry so that others may experience the same love. One of the women mentioned is Mary Magdalene. She was healed by Jesus of seven demons. Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name 12 times in the Gospels, which is more than most of the 12 male disciples of Jesus. She is one of the most faithful disciples to Jesus. She never left him even after he was crucified.

The second woman is Joanna. Her name means “God is generous.” It is interesting that Joanna's husband, Chuza, worked for Herod and had a position of authority in Herod's

household. This tells us that Joanna came from a prominent Jewish family. She gave her social/political influence and money to help the Jesus movement. This was very needed for a teacher from Galilee.

The third woman who is mentioned in this part of the story is Susanna. We don't know much about her, but she was significant enough to be mentioned by name. Then there is the mention of the "many other" women who were part of the group. I think they are an important part of the story because they may not have had a lot of money or resources to offer as to be mentioned by name, but the cumulative effect of their financial giving made a difference. This is good news for those of us who are unable to give big donations. We know that every contribution when added to the whole can add up to a big difference.

It is important to also note that these women did not just give one time and then disappear. They were there with Jesus until the bitter end. They stayed with him at the cross, helped with his burial, and then became the first witnesses to his resurrection. These women were turned from mere observers to active participants in the ministry of Christ. They became disciples by investing in the ministry. They left whatever family they had and followed Jesus. Money and resources were used to circulate the blessings of Jesus. There was no guilt or demands for the use of the money. It was used to give blessings. Money was put in its proper place. The investment they made was so important because it enabled the ministry of Jesus to continue, and it also transformed the women. They used their resources to keep the cycle of blessings flowing. It is no wonder that they were the ones who stayed with Jesus until the end. I know that when we invest our resources, we make a priority for that which we invest in. Jesus knew this when he said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21

Financial giving to the church is about our investment in the ministry of Christ. Whether we are able to give like Mary, Joanna, Susanna, or the "many others," the act of giving transforms us and transforms the world around us. Our money story changes when we invest in the work of Christ's love in the world. Instead of fear, greed, and scarcity, by giving we are able to live in gratitude for the gift of life and able to tame the consumption monsters of our times. In our culture we are often promised financial freedom if we learn to manage our money wisely. Yet, at the same time, we are bombarded daily with so many messages about how to spend or invest our money. The common money story in our culture often includes these elements: The trips that promise us happiness, the material possessions that promise to increase our worth or self-image, the security of having a lot of money saved up for the "golden years," and the entertainment traps that tells us that our worth is tied to what we can enjoy and consume. These myths promise things that they never deliver, especially on a long-term basis.

When we learn to see money as part of the gift of life and a tool to help us increase the flow of the cycle of blessings, we are freed to live more joyfully and freely. Our church ministry exists because so many have discovered what the women in our Bible story knew about the importance of supporting the ministry of Christ. There are about 110 active households in our church representing 220 members. Of the 110 households 67 households have given this year to the ministry of the church on a regular basis with an

average of \$50 per household each week. Most of the gifts are sizeable for the income of that household and so people would really miss them as they make an impact on their personal or family budget. The largest gifts are around \$10,000 while the smallest are around \$50 a year. On average, each household gives around \$2600 a year to the ministry of the church, because the work of Christ through our church is important to them. Our annual ministry expenses are about \$200,000 in addition to some capital expenses as we try to go by what people give. So the more people give, the more we are able to do in ministry. When there are special needs that arise, you open your hearts and give. We are also blessed with the giving from generations past who gave sizeable bequests that continue to help us today to do a lot of the outreach and service we do today. Some of you even go as far as filling out a pledge support form and we dedicate these commitments. There is so much generosity in our congregation and that is something that we celebrate and value as part of God's cycle of blessings in our midst. As disciples you have discovered the wisdom of the words of Christ according to Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." They also believe that the work of Christ through the community of Batavia First Presbyterian Church makes a huge difference in our corner of the world from the constant community use of our church building to the power of the Holy Spirit healing us through the music, worship, faith, and love we share both in and outside of the church.

The interesting thing is that scientific studies consistently show that giving makes us happier than spending on ourselves, especially when we give to something important to us. Here is a video with some of this research: <https://youtu.be/PWb87tcil94>.

We are going to end with a Lectio Divina using the verse from Matthew 6:21. I will read this verse three times and invite you to pay attention to how God is speaking to you through this verse: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21 Amen.