

“Inflation & the Cycle of Blessings: The Currency of Time and Place”
Acts 6:1-7

With rapid inflation, it is easy to fall into the trap of scarcity because we tend to believe that our wealth is only determined by the money we earn or have in our bank account. Churches sometimes think in the same way. Eric Law writes, “so many churches believe they are poor because they do not have an abundance of money. But I dare say that most churches are not poor at all. Partners for Sacred Places, an organization that focuses on understanding how congregations use their assets, including their buildings...published a study in 1997 showing urban congregations on average provided over \$140,000 in resources to support community-serving programs each year. In addition, the study found that four out of five of those served were not members of the congregations...They found that twelve Philadelphia congregations contributed \$52 million in annual economic value to the city of Philadelphia, for an average of \$4.3 million per congregation.” If we consider all the currencies of time and space that are given through a congregation, we see the tremendous wealth of a community.

The same can be true of our skills and time when they are shared with others. We often think of time being valuable when we get paid for it, but what if we shifted our thinking about how we share our time in the community? One such idea came to Edgar Cahn who dreamed of a new kind of money/currency. This currency was that of time. This way people can exchange time. He started what is known today as Time Banks in communities where people connect with each other and share their skills free of charge, but for exchanging their skills with someone else’s skills. Here is a video of how Time Banks work: <https://youtu.be/1yEflgxViDc>.

This kind of sharing expands our understanding of wealth and of our currencies. It uses our gracious leadership and spaces to help enhance our lives and our communities. We practice this kind of reciprocity in our church through the many ways our church building is used to serve others and through the many ways and hours people give to help others.

To give you an example of that, last August, our Vacation Bible School Director, Wendy Daniszewski, worked hard to share the space at church with the youth theatre group. They normally would have used the Chapel for their opening and closings for VBS, but because the space would have been the only spot where the youth theatre group could have their Godspell production, Wendy moved VBS to the Fellowship Hall. Godspell was a great production which benefited over 300 people in our community. In addition, the technology person who helped them, Tom Clark, offered to help us with the technology when Dr. Christopher Kerr came to Batavia to speak in September. This was an incredible example of how the cycle of blessings flowed through the sharing of the currencies of time and space. Everyone involved got to share and to receive different gifts.

This kind of sharing is also found in the story of the early church. When we look at what made the early church a powerful movement, we can see that it was their ability to mobilize people to share their gifts with others. The story of the first deacons in the church is a great story of the flow of these currencies. In the book of Acts, we hear how the

disciples tried to continue the mission of Jesus and his vision for the kingdom of God. The book records both stories of success and struggle and how the church dealt with them. In this episode from chapter 6, the early church was facing a problem. There were too many tables to serve the hungry and not enough people to do it. In addition, some people were grumbling that the leaders were ignoring the needs of the Hellenists (the Greeks) among the assembly. The leaders were accused of a bias to help the Hebrew hungry more than those who were Greek.

The issue was complex. The people were questioning the motivation of the leadership of the church. There were racial divisions and competition over human resources. The leaders could have felt overwhelmed by all of this. Instead, they came up with a brilliant and yet simple solution. Let's listen to Acts 6:1-7

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables. ³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.' ⁵ What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

They put it back on the people to discern who was called to leadership from their midst. They gave them some guidelines about the kind of people to be appointed: They needed to be full of the Spirit and of wisdom and of good character in the community. The solution had to come from the people themselves as they were led by the power of God's Spirit. The beautiful thing about this story is that it became the starting point for the ministry of deacons in churches all over the world. The twelve apostles realized that God was calling them to increase the number of people who were called to lead and to have a ministry that is solely focused on compassion, care, and feeding the hungry. The original deacons, the seven, were selected to serve tables. That ministry was expanded because of the people who were willing to give of their time and of their places/homes as the early church mostly gathered in homes.

We are invited today to consider our currency of time and place and how we can enhance the flow of that currency to help us face the rapid rate of inflation. I know that our church has been very intentional to invite many community groups to use the church building. None of our ministries would happen without all the people who give of their time. Yet, there is also another aspect of the giving of time and place which is about all the volunteer or helping hours each of us gives to family or community. I want to invite you to share some of these, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem. (Time of sharing)

This past Monday, we had six volunteers from our church go to Jackson School and Robert Morris to hand out candy and help the children and the staff with their Community Helper Day Halloween Celebration. There was so much joy, laughter, bonding, and sharing. Helping almost 500 children and almost 50 staff members know that we care about them was a tangible way to extend the table of Christ's love to the school. The communion elements we shared came in colorful wrappers, but it was the same spirit of love that brought us together to recognize the bond we share in our community. Here is a little video of that day to prepare us to celebrate the table of Christ here today and to remember to always extend its grace by sharing our time and spaces generously in the way of Jesus and his disciples.

Video: <https://youtu.be/indp7oP1gBY>. Amen.