

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 14, 2015

Earning Rewards

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

June 14, 2015

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

I absolutely hate those television commercials for Capital One credit cards. You know them I am sure. "What's in your wallet?" A big sales pitch that you can "earn" one and one-half percent on everything you charge. Of course that ignores the annual fee for the credit card and the huge interest charge each month unless you pay off the full balance each time you receive the bill. You aren't earning much of anything by this kind of rewards scheme.

And then there are grocery store rewards for gasoline discounts. Spend \$100 and get 5 cents off on a gallon of gasoline up to a maximum of 20 gallons. Of course, most of our cars can't hold 20 gallons, even if we are totally out of gas. At a maximum the discount is \$1 assuming that you can get all 20 gallons but it isn't really a reward at all. You are paying for it in higher grocery prices. On balance, you really aren't saving anything.

Then, of course, there are hotel and airline rewards. Earn a certain amount of points and you might, I say might, get a free night at a hotel or a free airplane ticket, that is if you can get a room or a seat when you want it. Typically there are blackout dates and huge restrictions on when and where you can use these points, if ever, because they expire if they aren't used.

One time some years ago I had accumulated some airline points and wanted to use them for an expensive trip we were planning to Europe if I bought the tickets the regular way. Back then there were very few restrictions on using airline points. I checked and saw that I was just a bit short of the number of airline points I needed to get the tickets for free but I saw a cheap roundtrip flight from where I lived at the time to Chicago. I booked that flight leaving in the morning and returning about an hour after I got to Chicago. I did it just to get the extra mileage points that I needed for the trip that we wanted to take. I spent money to go somewhere I didn't need to or want to go just to get those few extra points, but I did get them and turned them in for the trip to Europe.

Was that a crazy thing to do? Yes and no. A few hours were lost on a Saturday taking a needless trip to Chicago for about \$100 but that translated into saving about \$1000 for two round-trip tickets to Europe. In that case the airline rewards points worked out well for us. But it wouldn't work out today due to the limitations that now exist with airline rewards programs, blackout dates, limited number of available seats, and so on. Now because I used to travel overseas extensively in my work, I have enough points to go almost anywhere I might want to go but I'll never use them. I am not interested in airline travel anymore except to visit our children and, in any event, the points will probably expire before I get the chance to use them.

These rewards programs certainly aren't all that they are advertised to be. Yes, there are some benefits but they are small for what you have to go through and, depending upon the restrictions, you may receive little or nothing in the way of rewards.

God has a far better rewards program that provides you with unlimited benefits and you don't have to earn points. Our scripture reading from Matthew 6 outlines how we earn those benefits. Earlier in Matthew 5:12 Jesus said, *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."*

Some of you probably use the daily devotional, [Our Daily Bread](#). One devotion a few years ago (February 7, 2012) stated that our reward comes from accepting Christ and loyally serving him. This contrasts with the Pharisees who made a big show of piously giving, praying and fasting in public. That is what the opening verse of today's scripture reading is referring to, *"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven."*

Matthew 23:5-7 quotes Jesus as saying, ³ *"So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶ they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.*

The Pharisees were all show, a performance to obtain personal recognition from the public, but that did not sit well with Jesus, not at all. It was hypocrisy.

Certainly Jesus wants us to give, to pray and to fast, but not in public. *“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.”* They have collected their cash back, their hotel and airline points, but they are not getting the rewards that they thought they would be getting.

Instead Jesus instructs us. *“...when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

Unlike the public prayer of the Pharisees, Jesus instructs us to go to our room and pray. I hasten to add that this admonition refers to personal prayer, not corporate prayer such as what we do in our worship services.

Similarly Jesus tells us not to make an outward sign of fasting but to do it privately. And lastly, our scripture reading admonishes us not to seek out wealth as the Pharisees did. Our treasure is in our hearts and in acceptance of Christ. What more do we need?

Jesus instructed us to give, to pray and to fast privately because *“...your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

We don't serve Jesus to gain rewards. As the Our Daily Bread devotional said, *“When he died for us on the cross, he did far more for us than we deserve. Loyalty to him is an act of worship that expresses our loving gratitude for his love toward us. In return, he delights to encourage us with the assurance that ultimately his rewards will outweigh whatever we have given up for him.”*

Christ doesn't have any annual fees as credit cards do, or any blackout dates as hotel and airline rewards programs do, or any limits on his love. His rewards program has no expiration dates either.

Think of what resources you have --- knowledge, skills, time, and so forth. *“These are temporal and limited”* (Our Daily Bread, October 19, 2011). If we invest our resources of time, talent and knowledge *“... with an eye toward eternity, these*

temporary things can have enduring impact. What is your focus? Now or forever? Invest in the future. It will not only have an eternal impact, but it will change the way you view life each day.”

Do today what you can for Christ. Whatever you do will one day have heaven’s reward.

Amen.

Note: All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Liturgical color – green

This is the day the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Announcements

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Call to Worship (Responsive)

The time is ripe; the harvest is near!

Everything old is passing away.

The kingdom of God is springing to life.

See, everything is becoming new!

Let us worship God.

Opening Prayer

Holy One, source of life and goodness,
you scatter the seeds of new creation throughout all the earth.

Let your Word take root and grow in us,

so that, in the fullness of time,

the very least of your creatures

may reveal the greatness of your holy realm;

through Jesus Christ, teacher of wisdom. **Amen.**

Prayer Response Inside front cover of hymnal – In Unison

Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Incline Thine ear to us, And grant us Thy peace. Amen.

Psalm of Praise Psalm 20, a psalm of David. Pew Bible pages 856-857. Please read the even numbered verses responsively

¹ May the LORD answer you when you are in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

² **May he send you help from the sanctuary
and grant you support from Zion.**

³ May he remember all your sacrifices
and accept your burnt offerings.

⁴ **May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.**

⁵ May we shout for joy over your victory
and lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the LORD grant all your requests.

⁶ **Now this I know:**

The LORD gives victory to his anointed.

**He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary
with the victorious power of his right hand.**

⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

⁸ **They are brought to their knees and fall,
but we rise up and stand firm.**

⁹ LORD, give victory to the king!
Answer us when we call!

*Opening Hymn “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” #142

Call to Confession

At the baptismal font:

We no longer regard one another
from a human point of view,
for Christ has died for all,
to save us from sin and death.
Trusting in God's grace, let us confess our sin.

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

**Holy, triune God, we confess
that we have not lived for your glory.
We judge by outward appearances,
but you see what is in our hearts.
We look down on small things,
but you know how they will grow.
Forgive us, God of grace.
Teach us to live by faith,
trusting in the vision of your word
and the promise of a new creation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Assurance of God's Pardon

Lifting water from the font:

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation.
Everything old has passed away;
now everything is made new!
In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!
Thanks be to God.

*Gloria Patri #579– In Unison

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen

Prayer for Illumination

Blessed are you, O God, for in your wisdom,
you have revealed to your people
the mystery of your will.

Now, by the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to hear and believe your word
of truth:

the good news of our salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 – Pew Bible pages 1507-1509

Let us hear what the Lord will say,
for God speaks peace to the people,
to the faithful who open their hearts.

¹ “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;

righteousness and peace will kiss.

Surely our salvation is at hand.

Thanks be to God.

*Congregational Hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness”, #276

Sermon

“Earning Rewards”

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

Choral Anthem “Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)”, Eddie Fisher with Hugo Winterhalter’s Orchestra and Chorus. (CD 16, Track 8)

*Affirmation of Faith *Adapted from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Study Catechism, Question 2*

How do you live by the grace of the Lord
Jesus Christ?

I am not my own.

I have been bought with a price.

**The Lord Jesus Christ loved me
and gave himself for me.**

**I entrust myself completely to his care,
giving thanks each day for his wonderful
goodness.**

Tithes and Offerings

Consider the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who—though he was rich—
for our sakes became poor.
With gratitude for the grace of Jesus Christ,
let us offer our lives to God and
present our tithes and offerings to the Lord.

*Doxology #592 – In Unison

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise
Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer (Responsive)

What prayer concerns do we have to bring to the Lord this day?

As we pray, please respond to the words “By your Spirit, O God” with “**transform our lives.**”

In the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we call on the name of the Lord, saying:

By your Spirit, O God, **transform our lives.**

We pray for the church . . .

In the love of Christ, open our hearts
to find joy in sorrow, richness in poverty,
and new life, even in the dust of death.

By your Spirit, O God, **transform our lives.**

We pray for the world . . .

Give us the courage to confront our enemies
not with mighty weapons of war,
but with confidence in your will.

By your Spirit, O God, **transform our lives.**

We pray for this community . . .

Teach us how good and pleasant it is
when we live together in unity;
bless us with abundant life and peace.

By your Spirit, O God, **transform our lives.**

We pray for loved ones . . .

Give them peace in your presence,
even as the storms rage around them,
even in the midst of suffering and stress.

By your Spirit, O God, **transform our lives.**

Gracious God, continue to pour out your power
in the church, in the world, and in our daily lives,
so all will know that you are at work among us;
through Jesus Christ, our living Lord,
who taught us to pray, **Our Father.... Amen.**

*Closing Hymn “Take My Life” #391

*Blessing and Charge

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here I am; send for me!”.

Amen