

# Looking Back

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There will be a packing party on Saturday from 12 to 3. But I want to also say that the following week we will be collecting those boxes.

People will be delivering them to the church and there's a sign-up sheet here just for people to be here at the church to receive shoeboxes when people bring them in and they'll be all piled up up here.

So if you can help out for an hour, like I said, just to be here to receive the boxes, that would be great. I think that any other announcements that people, that I forgot that people want to mention?

All right, then let's get our worship on. Good morning, church.

[ 3 : 4 1 ] We're entering into our worship space a little differently today. We're going to open our hearts in a fresh way. So I want you to hear these words as we prepare to praise God.

The relationship of money practices to faith was as complex in Jesus' day as it is today. This week, we look back at a moment when Jesus was pushed to offer money advice.

We will also look back at the origins of our own relationship to money as a first step to claiming a life that is rich in wonder, love, and grace.

The saying goes that the things we are most afraid of are death and taxes. And there may be some truth to this. And there also may be a lot of fear in common between our fear of death and fear of money.

Both of these things are what we call underlying fears, meaning that we may not admit that we have these fears, but we certainly don't talk about them openly. And so, in this worship series, we're going to light a special candle each week asking God to illumine the shadowy corners of our lives where unspoken but powerful fears reside.

[ 5 : 0 1 ] I'm going to invite you to sing the first verse of Be Thou My Vision with us. Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart Not be all else to be saved that Thou art Thou my best thought by day or by night Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light And let's pray this prayer together responsibly.

We light this flame to affirm that where there is light There is light And where there is understanding Where there is compassion Where there is possibility Holy and living God Transform our fears into awe-inspired wonder Amen Would you please stand as we lift up our praise With our two opening songs Spirit of God, descend upon my heart And above all Spirit of God, descend upon my heart

We did from earth through all its pulses blue Stooped to my weakness Mighty as Thou art Teach me to feel that Thou art always Thine Teach me to feel that Thou art always Thine Teach me the struggles of the soul to break To check the rising doubt the rebel side

Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer  
Cast thou not give me  
Cast thou not give me  
Lovely God and King  
All thine own soul, Lord  
Statt and strength and light  
I see Thy cross there  
Teach my heart to pray  
O let me seek Thee and  
O let me find  
Thank you  
Thank you

Thank you  
Thank you  
Thank you  
Above all power  
Above all power  
Above all things  
Above all nature  
And all created things  
Above all ways  
Above all ways  
Above all web  
We are blessed ■■■■■■ estás

[ 11 : 30 ] Edgar Yes Cin■em Jeopard Ja ■■■ You may be seated.

One of the announcements that I didn't highlight that, you know, when I said, does anybody have anything, I should have said, oh, you do. Thank you. On the 27th of November, the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, we'll be hanging the greens, decorating the church, and there'll be some children's activities and a potluck dinner.

And as I said to the service last night, I've never been to a potluck dinner here. I've been here, you know, we've been here two and a half years, and there hasn't been able to be a potluck dinner, so bring your favorite potluck dish and come on over.

The details about time and everything are in the bulletin, so I just invite you to be a part of that. Our mission moment will be a video about serve and supporting veterans, and one of the things that I experienced at the Thursday night dinner up in Niagara Falls was how many veterans that program supports.

And it's veterans who support veterans, picking up meals to take to those veterans, and this ministry is vital in Niagara County where this particular one is.

[ 13 : 51 ] I invite you after the video to just be in a time of prayer, enjoying the music, and being mindful of what it is that we offer from our heart to God.

Thank you. Hi, everyone. Jennifer D'Andrea from Serve Niagara. Thank you for inviting me in again this year to talk about my organization, Serve Niagara, and its mission.

You all have supported us in our previous missions with our housing for homeless and disabled veterans, as well as Thanksgiving and Christmas outreach. We're here again this year to ask for your support in helping us with our Christmas mission that has just gotten so big since we started and last time we saw you.

Last Christmas, we provided for over 800 veterans and their family members in Niagara County. Our mission is only Niagara County veterans, so that should tell you how big this outreach is.

In our outreach for holiday time, we provide ham dinners to every single family, Christmas trees if needed, wreaths, poinsettias, winter coats, boots, and other items for the children that we get a wish list for.

[ 15 : 02 ] You can find our wish list and pictures and other information on our holiday outreach program on our website, [ServeNiagara.org](http://ServeNiagara.org), and also on our Facebook page. You'll be able to see what we have done over the years.

Every year we've gotten bigger, and with over 800 people last year, we're really scared for this Christmas. We could really use your support in supporting this mission, not just in donations, but with time, with helping to deliver to local families.

And also, if you know of any veteran in this community that could use a little extra help this holiday season, please let us know. Again, you can find the information on our website.

There's an actual form that you can download, and you can submit a request for family assistance. Thank you again in considering [ServeNiagara](http://ServeNiagara.org) and helping us reach our mission in Niagara County for veterans and their families.

Happy Holidays. Feel free to sing with us.

[ 16 : 14 ] This is one you know. You are good.

You are good. When there's nothing good in me. You are love. You are love. On display for all to see. You are light. You are light.

You are light. You are light. When the darkness closes in. You are hope. You are hope. You have covered all my sin.

You are peace. You are peace. When my fear is crippling. You are true. You are true. Even in my wandering.

You are joy. You are joy. You are joy. You are the reason that I sing. You are light. You are light. In you, death has lost its sting.

[ 17 : 21 ] You are light. You are love. You are light. You are love. You are love. You are love. You are love. I'm running to your arms. I'm running to your arms.

The riches of your love will always be numb. Nothing compares to your embrace.

■ ■ ■ My heart will sing

No other name Jesus Jesus My heart will sing No other name Jesus Jesus Jesus, my heart will sing No other name Jesus, Jesus My heart will sing No other name Jesus, Jesus And oh, I'm running to your arms I'm running to your arms The riches of your love Will always be now Nothing compares to your embrace

Light of the world forever reign Light of the world forever reign O Lord, we come wanting a full life A full life of wonder and joy and faith So in our giving, in our living, in our stretching

[ 21 : 00 ] And in our holding May we come close to you In this space and time of offering Hear our prayers of thanksgiving In Jesus' name, amen You may be seated A couple of things to share In this time of prayer And both joy and celebration And this is one of those announcements That Nancy Dimmick passed away this weekend And that is both a sorrow And also a joy and a relief Because she prayed That it would be time Her service will be at 10 o'clock Next Saturday morning here At the church And Scott, you have An announcement To me Concern to share as well Right I don't know if you heard that

Sandra Kelly Passed away as well Anything else? Yes You probably want to share Something I forgot to share Yes I had the honor of being At a jurisdictional conference last week Where we interviewed Episcopal candidates And it was such hard work But fulfilling work And we have Our new bishop January 1st Hector Durgos Will be our new bishop He is the first January 1st In our jurisdiction And he is also The very first Puerto Rican bishop In that operation It was hard work It was fulfilling It was a joy Also I got to see Julie Maciejewski On the way home She sends her love To everyone She misses everyone But in the middle Of the hard work And the joy I also lost my father Also Please make my family Thank you

So if you didn't hear Our jurisdiction Which is the northeast Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church Elected a new bishop Hector Burgos Is our new bishop He comes from the New Jersey conference And Linda also lifted up That her father-in-law Richard Barsakowski Passed away this past week Anything?

Yes Are you taking joy Sure Absolutely Bring it on So I'd like to I'd like to Because we know Election is Tuesday And we're in a Divided state of affairs Here And I know that Veterans Day Is also on Friday And I personally Would like to thank Everybody In this congregation Who has Or is currently Serving in our military I'm so proud Of all of you And I thank you From the bottom Of my heart Amen Let's pray Oh Lord You hear Our words But even more You know our hearts You know hearts Can be broken You made us human

You made us with feelings And we celebrate And honor And give thanks And we weep And mourn We do give thanks For people Who have served This country In so many Different ways May we remember A willingness To serve Lives given Sacrifices made And may we say Thank you Lord we lift up Those families Who have experienced Loss This week And all the weeks We're coming into A season where Lord it's tough Because we remember Faces around Tables Celebrations And oh how we are Filled with love And the tears

[ 25 : 43 ] Come Thank you Lord for giving us The ability To love Those Even when We've lost them Let our tears Be tears Of gratitude Even in the morning May our Thanksgivings Be Abundant In the joy Of the sky Of the morning And the chance To live another day Be present All across Our country This week That there might Be safety That people Who serve And people Who act In the privilege Of voting The responsibility Of voting May be safe Hear the prayers That we dare Not say Or we feel Like there's Not time To say You know us We pray

That you will Love us And bring Your spirit For healing And abundance In Jesus name We pray Amen Good morning Our relationship With money Has a history As long as our lives But also Expansive as the Family systems And culture Of which we are part Creating spiritual

Practices for how We deal with money Invites us to look back But see with new eyes How and when Our values and fears Were initiated The movie It's a wonderful life Starts with God Making arrangements To send an angel To assist George Bailey God says There's a man down On earth That needs our help Clarence the angel Responds Is he sick?

God says No worse He's discouraged typing No worse No worse Only No winner Go He's All Jean ■■■ Like George Bailey, we sometimes need some help in the midst of discouragement that can come out of our fear about money.

We look back with a practice of compassion for ourselves and others and a faith that reminds us of our true worth. Let us prepare our hearts for the scripture this day.

[ 29 : 56 ] The scripture today is from the book of Matthew, chapter 22, verses 15 through 22. Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.

They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. Teacher, they said, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

You aren't swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, you hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying this tax.

They brought him a denarius and he asked them, whose image is this and whose inscription? Caesar's, they replied. And then he said to them, so give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

[ 31 : 02 ] But when they heard this, they were amazed, so they left him and went away. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Friends, would you join me for a word of prayer?

Gracious and loving God, it is indeed a beautiful time. We are awestruck by the beauty of the day, the beauty of the moment, and the beauty we see in one another.

So Lord, with our hearts open, receiving and welcoming you, please come to each of us, fall fresh on us, and give us what you know we need. Plant a seed in us that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So we're starting this new walk together over these next few weeks called It's a Wonderful Life.

And it's, you look at your bulletin, you see it's not just the single word wonderful. It's wonder slash full. And we'll explain what that means over the course of the next few weeks.

[ 32 : 25 ] But obviously, having heard it, and having heard what Carol just shared, I'm willing to bet most everybody's brains went back to the movie, right? Most folks have seen that movie probably a few times because it used to be on this loop on Christmas Eve, right?

Anybody not seen that movie? It's okay, there's a few. It's all right. Well, we're going to trust that people close to you can explain some of these references. But as we enter this conversation today, we want to talk about the problem that George is facing.

Because the problem George is facing is one we all face. And how we confront that is critical in our walk in faith.

And as we do that, consider this. I'm willing to bet most of us have probably gone to some celebrations of life.

Gone to funerals. And I can't ever recall going to a funeral where the focus of conversation was on the person's things.

[ 33 : 35 ] Where people were focused on how nice their house was. Or the kind of car they drove. Or their wardrobe.

Now the focus is on people's impact. The things they did that matter in our life. The ways that they made us feel.

The ways in which they helped other people. The focus is on their impact. And that's important to all of us. Most people I know want to have a positive impact.

They want their lives to mean something. They want to know that their time made a difference somehow. And that's tricky business.

Because when we start thinking about the ways in which we have impact on people. Sometimes we look at our lives and we start to think we're not having the impact that we want to have.

[ 34 : 40 ] That we'd like to have more fruit or bear more fruit with our lives. If you've ever had that thought pass through your head.

Then you might start to feel a little of what George was feeling. See the key here is the power of discouragement.

Because discouragement is a dangerous feeling. We look often around us and it's easy for us to get discouraged. Because what we see here tells us that maybe things aren't going according to plan.

That maybe we're not as close to our goals as we thought. And then those negative emotions start to creep in. And the more we confront them.

The easier it is for us to pull back. To disengage. To take ourselves off the path that God has desired for us. I mean we see it in George's story, right?

[ 35 : 52 ] For those of you who may not be familiar. The story centers on this man named George Bailey. He runs a financial institution. And he finds himself with a really big debt.

And he's let some people down. And he's overwhelmed by that. Not to mention that piece. He's got some family issues at home. And what's happened is thing after thing after thing.

Has talked him into this place. Where he has become mightily discouraged. So discouraged in fact. He's considering suicide. And that's the dialogue.

That Carol described for you. Because as he's coming to that moment. We hear God decide to intervene. Where God says, I'm going to send you, Clarence, this new angel.

Down to help George. And Clarence asks, well, what's the matter? Is he sick? And God's words are really important.

[ 36 : 53 ] No, it's worse. He's discouraged. Because discouragement has such powerful impact.

And what we want to talk about today is how do we fight through those moments of discouragement. Because they invariably come to every single one of us. That we come up against some obstacle.

And we find ourselves going, we can't deal with that. We don't know the way forward. We don't know the answer to this problem. And if it's money question.

Then it can really start to drive home, right? Because when we talk about this idea of impact. The way those we remember fondly impacted us.

And we start to think about, well, what tools do we have at our disposal that make us have an impact? What are the things that we can do that allow us to impact lives positively? In the church, we tend to think of that as three T words.

[ 37 : 53 ] Three words that start with T. First, we give our time. Secondly, we give our talent. Thirdly, we give our treasure. Hence, the connection to money. Time, talent, and treasure.

All of those are tools that we have at our disposal that give us the ability to have an impact. Now, as you sit here and think about your every day.

You may look at your calendar. And you think, well, I don't have all that much time. How am I going to give more time to do more positive things?

You may look at your gifts. You may think, well, I can't do those things. So how do I have an impact or a greater impact?

And of course, we get to the last one. The one that all of us are feeling in our own way. Because we look at that hard, cold math on the bank statement.

[ 38 : 56 ] And we start to ask ourselves, well, where am I going to find more treasure? And so we start to feel discouraged.

It gets worse. Because if you've had an experience that caused you to get burned. In other words, you invested time in something.

And you felt like that time was not well spent. You didn't see the result. You put yourself out there and says, well, I'll try this. And you got embarrassed or you didn't see the result.

Or it didn't pan out the way you thought. Maybe you took some of the money that you were clinging to. Somebody may have taken advantage of it.

Or you didn't see a return. And it chips away at that spirit in your soul. And you start to feel discouraged. That's a hard place to be.

[ 40 : 02 ] The question is, how do we work our way through that? Because we said those moments are inevitable. They're part of the human condition. And our challenge then becomes pressing on.

Fortunately for us, there is an answer. And it comes, ironically, in the story we read today. Because we usually don't read this story for this reason.

But the answer is there if we pay attention. So, when you hear this story, most of us are familiar with it. If we've walked in the church for a while. And it has one of Jesus' most famous lines.

This is one of those ones that's actually gotten beyond the church. Right? Render unto Caesar. What is Caesar's? And render unto God. What is God's? But let's go a little further into that story.

Right? The story is pretty straightforward. You hear it explained. And actually, Luke gives us the background. He says these people came at Jesus because they wanted to trip him up. They wanted to trap him.

[ 41 : 03 ] They wanted him to fall into a place where they could actually get him arrested and subsequently kill him. Because he was too popular. They didn't like the message. And they wanted to take him out. And so they put him in what seems like an impossible place.

Because most people wouldn't have been able to do what Jesus is doing. That's because he's Jesus. But they gave him what should have been a really impossible question to answer. Right?

Because if they ask him, well, should we pay the imperial tax? And you can see how that's a trap. Because if he says, sure, pay your imperial tax, then the people will say, well, he's loyal to Rome.

Forget him. And if he says, don't pay the imperial tax, then the Romans will say, he's breeding sedition. Kill him. So it is a pretty intense trap.

But Jesus is Jesus. And he's on to them. But he actually gives us more powerful advice than we expect.

[ 42 : 09 ] So when the crowd's around him, he says, bring me the coin. So someone gives him a coin called a denarius.

And it's the currency of the day. And he asks a pretty simple question. So he holds up the coin. Whose image is this? Whose image is this?

And everybody knows whose image it is. The coins of the time had an image of the emperor on them. The emperor Tiberius. There was also probably an image of a Roman goddess of some kind.

And would have been some inscription. Whose image is this? And everybody knows the answer. But the question is a little deeper than we give ourselves credit for.

See, because one of the things in the culture at the time, and I didn't know this until I actually dug deep into it in preparation for today. But it speaks so powerfully to the message.

[ 43 : 11 ] Is that if somebody's image was on a thing, like you would see it on buildings, you would see it in other places too. If somebody's image was on a thing, the thing was perceived as belonging to them.

It was perceived as belonging to them. So whose image is this? People say, well, Caesar's. And Jesus, of course, replies, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's.

But that line takes on a really special and much deeper meaning when you understand what I just told you. Because sometimes it escapes us about whose image is this.

Because when you read a little earlier in human history, one of the things that happens is, God says, well, let us make humanity in our image.

So all of us bear the image of God.

[ 44 : 33 ] Every single one of us, without exception, bear the image of God. And here's the second part.

Not only do we bear the image of God, we belong to God. We belong to God.

Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's. When you consider your life, your time, your talent, your treasure, it's so easy to forget that in many ways, it's not your own.

It's God's. Every day you have, you have because God gave it to you. Every gift you have, you have because God gave it to you.

All that you possess, you possess because God says, here, you can have this. The challenge that most of us have is when we get discouraged, when we experience loss in the world, when that voice starts to speak into our brains and into our hearts, we start to think, well, I can't give this up.

[ 45 : 59 ] I can't risk this because I need to take care of myself.

I can't afford to lose this thing. And yet, the thing that we forget is that the more we try and cling, the more we try to hold on, the more we say, nope, I can't share that with other people because then what will happen to me is that it puts us in a place that's the exact opposite of who Jesus is.

It's the exact opposite of how God deals. And when we get discouraged, the world puts us in that place that says, I have to hold on tighter because I'm scared.

I have to hold on tighter because I've been hurt. the problem is, is that you are owning and standing in the discouragement.

See, the thing is, it's logical, as we said. You look at your calendar. You look at your bank statement. You say, I just don't, I can't.

[ 47 : 21 ] I mean, I can give this because I won't miss that, but I can't give more than that. It's logical. No one's questioning the math.

No one's questioning the logic. It's logical. The question that we really want to wrestle with, though, is, is it faithful?

It's logical. But is it faithful? See, the faithful part is where we have to dig a little deeper because the faithful piece says, God, I know that you've given this to me and I don't see an answer, but I'm going to trust you anyway.

Anyway. takes courage to go to that place, but it's not easy to do.

But we need to remember a simple truth about who our God is because our God has already shown us what God can do with just a little bit.

[ 48 : 41 ] right? That our God has shown us that God can magnify and take places, take things to places completely unexpected because that's how God chooses to work.

That God would choose to save humanity with an unknown guy and his family in a boat. that God would choose to take an unknown boy from a family that nobody heard of, raise that boy to the second most highest office in Egypt, and then use him to deliver his people.

That God would take a shepherd from nowhere, completely unknown, and turn him into the king. that God would actually take a conquered nation, one that had lost everything, and say, you know what, I'm going to do something that the world's never seen.

I'm going to let you go back home without even having to raise a sword. God would take a girl from nowhere nobody knew about, nobody had seen nothing special about her.

and use her to be the vehicle through which he would save the world, because he would enter the world through her. That cross, as the song says, the symbol of shame.

[ 50 : 21 ] God would take the ultimate symbol of humiliation and turn it into, for us, the ultimate symbol of victory. and the thing that we fear, just as we talked about in the opening, when the world looks at death and sees it as the end and has no hope, our God has already shown us that death does not have the final word.

and yet, we do our math and we get discouraged. how do we then remember that we have a God who can do things?

We serve and follow a God who can. Not a God who can't, a God who can and has already shown us that he is a God who can.

imagine what might happen if you chose trust. If you took one small step in faith.



See, the interesting thing about It's a Wonderful Life, and this is the thing that many of us forget, is that George, when he's on that bridge, the thing about George in that moment is that he's not wrong about his situation.

[ 51 : 59 ] I mean, he does his math, he looks at everything, and he says, he's not wrong about what he's looking at. He doesn't have bad information.

What he's done is reach a bad conclusion about it. That's the power of being discouraged. But you see what happened.

when God steps in. When God steps in. Because God stepped in and showed George something that George didn't even know God was capable of.

That's who our God is. That's what our God does over and over again. God is God. So don't let the power of discouragement take you off the path.

Don't let the power of discouragement take you to a place that lets you think that when you do your hard cold math that there's no answer. You may not have an answer, but we are the people of a God who has already.

[ 53 : 14 ] we are the people of a God who has done right now. And the people of a God who will in the future as well. We are a people of a God who can.

And because we are a people of a God who can, we should never be discouraged. because our God is who he says he is.

See, we render unto Caesar all the time. We're used to it. It's part of living on this planet. We just do it. We don't like it, but we do it.

Imagine what might happen if you chose trust and actually rendered to God all that is God's.

Amen and amen. Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks that you are who you are. And let us have the courage. Let us take one small step in faith where we truly render all that we have to you.

[ 54 : 27 ] Our time, our talent, our treasure, knowing that you can increase it beyond anything we might expect, just like you took that small boy's lunch and turned it into a miracle for 5,000.

You have the answers. Let us remember that when we don't see them, you still have them. We believe in the God who can.

Let us never be discouraged. Amen. Amen. We come to this table week after week to be reminded of who God is and what God has done for us.

That we may remember that you and I, we are made in the image of God fed in this meal.

The Lord be with you. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and a good and a joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

[ 56 : 00 ] you formed us in your image and breathed into us the very breath of life. When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

It's you that delivered us from captivity and made covenant to be our God and spoke to us through your prophets. So with the people, your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed are you and holy is your son, Jesus Christ.

[ 57:17 ] By the baptism of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered, us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

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