

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE - FEB. 26, 2012

Reflections

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

'OKAY. HERE'S \$1 MILLION. WHAT'S NEXT?'

By Dr. Mark H. Miller (*edited to fit Reflection space*)

Recently it was announced that a CNN producer won \$1 million off of a lottery scratch-ticket. The question was asked of the nation: What would you do if you were he?

One answer was humorous and truthful: Hide from my relatives.

This got me to thinking about how I relate to money as a person of faith.

As for the \$1 million I would need to acknowledge that the money is not mine, at least in the conventional sense. I didn't earn it. I didn't achieve it. I was lucky.

In that sense, not being mine, it doesn't belong to me.

Which triggers a truth for us who understand that all good things come from God's hand: we use the *wrong* verb when we donate. To donate is *not* to give, to send, to bestow. Not for a minute. Rather, when we donate we are *returning* what was given to us by God's hand. The congregation Diane and I are in conversation with about stewardship and gifting understands this. They understand that words like "budget" and "pledging" don't communicate the dynamics of gift and grateful return as decisions are made by congregational members on their "returning amount" (formerly known as "pledge card").

This congregation also understands the error of a adopting written budget *before* asking for "cards of returns." Why? Because a member will note the budget increase is 5%...which means the member will say, "Well, my current gift is \$100 a year. To do my part I will make it \$105."

To "return" is not merely "my part in budget support." Rather, to "return" is "my faith received as a gift, the ways in which God has blessed me, what my church means to me – in short *gratitude!*"

Key questions to ask, whether or not any windfall of money fall upon us, are:

What do we value? Our money follows our values.

Do we understand the mantra of society –the more you have the better you are - is wrong? Monetary wealth and value are not synonyms. The Gospel says, the more you love the better you are. Even more, the more you give the more you grow. The synonyms of rich and blessed living go like this: giving, growing, loving. All values that fulfill life's purpose.

Why speak of this now? It's October when churches ramp up their total stewardship/giving efforts which generally last no more than two weeks. We speak of it now because the notion of "What do I do with what I have"— is among the last frontiers of faith to be explored among American congregations.

As has been offered over the years, we cannot take our money with us. Ever seen a hearse with a luggage rack? So the abiding question for our time right now is *How is the use of our money furthering the kingdom of God on earth?*

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