

Sermon: Spiritual and Financial

Scripture: I John

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

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So that's why we are doing this. We are doing a capital campaign in a very difficult economic times simply because our beautiful church needs to be repaired and restored. Those are some beautiful images aren't they? And yes its this land that we are situated upon and this building itself that is beautiful but it is also what goes on here that is beautiful – the relationships we build, the music-making, the worshipping, the ministries that reach out from here to the world, the prayers for healing and comfort that are generated here, the meals we make for one another and the bread we break together at communion or fellowship time or at one another's homes; that's all a part of the beauty that is the Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC and that's why we want to ensure that its roof, steeple, columns, interior walls and all are strong, stable and beautiful for not just this year but for many many years down the road.

A local interior decorator walked into our sanctuary not long ago and said – it's a beautiful sanctuary but it looks tired. And it really is a bit tired and wouldn't we be after about 160 years of being here through all sorts of weather and through weekly worship and through ceremonies of joy and celebration and services of loss and sorrow. It's feeling and looking rather tired to say nothing of the leaking roof. But the truth of the matter is that our community is NOT a tired community, the spirit that is in this church is by no means a tired spirit, the activities that go on in and around this place are not wearisome activities – no one can listen to Carl or Annemieke play the piano and feel tired, we never get tired of hearing the choir, I never get any indication from this community that we get weary of supporting the ministries of JUMP and the Lund Center and the Salvation Army, our spending on missions in our budget never goes down, it only goes up, we don't get tired of exploring our faith and talking of God, we never ever ever get tired of our pastor's sermons. We are NOT a tired congregation nor are we are dying congregation nor are we are chipped and peeling and dull pink congregation. No way! We are alive and energized and growing, not tired but awake... or at least trying to be more and more awake all the time. Therefore it only makes sense that such would be reflected in our physical building as well, for the physical is reflective of the spiritual.

I usually have a few sessions with couples before I marry them in order to get to know them better since most couples that come here to be married don't have any connection but come because they are looking for a beautiful church and find it here. But in those premarital meeting. One of the things I continually hear from the young couples I marry is that they are spiritual but not religious. It's kind of an inside joke for pastor's because we hear it so often of late. And its usually said as though no one has ever said it before and with just a little bit of defensiveness in their voice. "I'm not religious but I am spiritual" they say thinking I might challenge them on it by saying- "excuse me, but that's impossible, if you are not religious then you are definitely not spiritual either!" Or something like that. I often see them breath a little better when they realize that I have no problem with the distinction. Of course, there is organized religion and there is spirituality and the two aren't necessarily one and the same thing. There are times that organized religion misses or even detracts from one's spirituality and certainly spirituality that falls outside of the realm of the organized church. But hopefully, we do a pretty good job in this organized church of having the two meet so that we might even say to non-church people - "actually I am religious AND spiritual. If you can believe that! My religion and my spirituality do intesect and co-mingle and inform one another. I really can be both religious and spiritual." I'll tell you, it would news to some people that such is possible!

But here's my point - the thing about organized religion and specifically the Christian religion is that it is embodied, enfleshed, incarnated - it is not so much a set of spiritual ideas and doctrines and notions as it is a community in this world and it is from the centering place of a local community in a church building worshipping and working and fellowshiping together that we as Christians then move out to serve the world in whatever we do. The organized church roots us - as our slide show so eloquently said - in a particular place that can then nurture and support, inspire and challenge us so that we then move out beyond the organized place we call church to BE spiritual and live spiritually in the world. The spiritual and the physical are not separate.

And I hope we can approach the process of this capital campaign not with the thought that it's a distraction or detour from our spiritual lives and work but rather that this is a part of how we see and understand our spirituality - this building, these grounds, this beloved community of various and sundry people and the money we need to keep it

strong and healthy is our spirituality enfolded and embodied. Money is a hugely powerful force and symbol in our lives if not the very central one for many of us and it too, its accumulation and its spending and its use cannot be something separate from our spirituality but is one of the ways that our spirituality is necessarily embodied. I have to say, when we all voted for doing this capital campaign and then when I saw some of the things that you had so willingly signed your pastor up to do I kind of wanted to say “actually, I am spiritual and not financial.” But they really can’t be separated out like that can they? Just as the spiritual ideally informs the religious and the religious embodies or enfolds the spiritual, so too must the spiritual inform the financial and the financial embody or enfold the spiritual.

So that’s what we are going to be doing in the church over the next weeks in this capital campaign is holding the financial front and center to our spirituality and for at least this month we really aren’t going to be able to pretend that they are two separate things. You have money and you are spiritual and your spiritual home is asking for you to spiritually consider giving your money for the sake of its roof and steeple and columns and interior and ideally for an endowment so that we can have the resources we need to care for this building for many many more decades to come.

Now the primary way you are invited to hold together the financial and the spiritual in this process is by asking you to be in prayer about all of this and your role within it and to pray for one another as well. I hope you read about that in my recent Courier article. You are also going to receive a packet today with a daily devotional in it that you are invited to read each day for a month. It will not only help inform your own process as you decide what you can do for the campaign but I really think it will also press you into reflecting hard on your finances and your spirituality. And to tell you the truth, I think it’s beautiful timing for this evaluating of the relationship between our money and our spirituality with all the economic turmoil. It could be argued, as many people have, that the current crisis is exactly the result of our separating out our financial lives from our spiritual lives in this country and that we really do need to do some serious soul searching around this very thing. Could this capital campaign afford us this very opportunity while also inspiring us to give generously and joyfully for the well-being of our beloved church?

So what we are embarking on today in this capital campaign really is a spiritual journey together. Even as we are challenged to be prayerful and intentional about how we might each contribute to this effort we will necessarily be growing together as a church and deepening ourselves spiritually in the process. May we find blessing within this process so that our church can continue to offer blessings to a world in need of all the blessings it can get. Amen.