

Science, Money, and the Body of Christ

*A Sermon Preached by
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Energy is the ability to do work.  
Energy can be neither created nor destroyed.  
Energy can transform into matter.  
Matter can convert back into energy.

Like you, I learned all these basic science facts back in high school physics class. These universal thermodynamic principles govern everything in our world from how a blade of grass grows to what is needed to launch a rocket to the moon. When you stop and think about it, the laws of energy and matter also operate in our financial lives: how we earn money, how we spend money, and why we save money. An appropriate topic for the last of our Stewardship Sundays. Yes, that's a hint.

Every day, you go to work, if you are lucky enough to still have a job. You put your personal energy into your work. At the end of the day, you have earned a certain amount of money. Your personal energy has been converted into matter: shiny coins, crisp dollar bills, or perhaps more economic electrons flowing into your online banking account. In whatever form, the money you've earned is really nothing but your energy held in a state of suspended animation, "frozen energy" so to speak. On its own, your money is essentially worthless. You can't eat your coins for dinner. Dollar bills don't make very good fuel for your car. An electronic balance transfer won't keep you very warm. But when you spend that money, you activate that frozen energy; you thaw it out. You convert the energy you originally put into your daily work into other much more useful things—food for dinner, gasoline for your car, clothing for your children.

Today, we live in a world that is full of fear. So many things make us worry deeply about the future. Will I lose my retirement investments? Will I lose my job? Will my husband or wife be called up for military service overseas? Will my children come down with H1N1? It is no wonder that we all have the human impulse to hold on tightly to whatever wealth or resources we have, because who knows when we might need them just to survive. So we save, we hoard, we put away our surplus as a hedge against all the hardships that seem to lurk just around the corner. We store up our treasure, our "frozen energy" like so many TV dinners in our financial refrigerator, against the time when we may otherwise be totally out of luck. And we think, if I give some of my money to you, well, that just means there's going to be less for me.

By now, you may be thinking to yourselves, we came to church this morning to hear the Gospel, not some amateurish lecture on economics. Well, the Gospels are full of stories Jesus told about money, its meaning, and its proper place in the machinery of God's universe. We hear, for example, the story of the Rich Fool in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 21.

*The land of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "I will tear down my barns and build even bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself: You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be*

*merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" And Jesus said, "Watch out! Guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not come down to how many possessions he has."*

So here's a guy who copes with his anxieties about the future by hoarding his wealth and comforting himself with his abundance. His chariot probably has a bumper sticker that reads, "He who dies with the most toys wins." But God says, "No, my son, he who dies with the most toys is still dead."

Or consider the Parable of the Talents in Matthew, Chapter 25. A rich man who is going away on a journey gives money to his servants to invest for him while he's gone: say \$5,000 to one servant, \$2,000 to another, and \$1,000 to a third. When he returns home, the first two servants have successfully leveraged and doubled their money, and the master praises them lavishly for their ambition. The third servant, though, was afraid. He knew his master was a harsh man. So he hid his money in a hole in the ground so he wouldn't lose what little he had.

*"You wicked, lazy servant!"* the master says when he returns. *"You should have invested my money with the bankers, so that when I returned I would at least have gotten it back with interest. Throw this worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Jesus seems to be saying to us that whatever we hold on to, whatever we hoard, whatever we cling to out of fear-- it won't save us; it might destroy us.

On the other hand, think of the parable of the Shrewd Manager in Luke, Chapter 16. He's the one who was about to be fired for wasting his master's wealth.

"My master is taking away my job," he says. "I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—I have to do something so that people will welcome me when I lose my job here." And he boldly proceeds to call in each of his master's debtors and slashes in half whatever they owe. The manager is able to give back at least some profit to his master. Something is always better than nothing; and the master praises his manager's shrewdness and initiative.

"Hey you, take a risk, you don't always have to play it safe," Jesus is telling us. Fear gets you nowhere, but a little faith and trust in God will get you home safe. As the old saying goes, "The Will of God will never take you where the Grace of God will not protect you."

This message is also at the heart of the story told about the poor widow in Mark, Chapter 12:

*Jesus was watching the crowd as they put their offerings into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Jesus said, "This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she in her poverty, put in everything she had to live on."*

This poor widow is probably the most fearless character in the Gospels. She has only two coins to live on, and she gives it all up to God, recklessly trusting in God's love, God's grace, God's promise to provide life, and life in abundance. There is no fear in her, only faith.

Relax, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Unclench your fists. Do not be afraid. I am with you.

*"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. Who can add a single hour to your life by worrying? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. Don't set your heart on what you will eat or drink; don't worry*

*about it. Your Father knows that you need these things. But seek first the kingdom of God, and everything else will be given to you.*

Every Sunday, we come to this Table of the Lord and we eat the bread and drink the wine that is the Body and Blood of Christ. We become, in the words of the Prayer Book, “the very members incorporate in the Mystical Body of Christ.” What does it mean to be a member of the Mystical Body of Christ? Simply this: when we feed on the Body and Blood of Christ, we become the physical Body of Christ in this world, his hands, his feet, his mouth. We become Christ for the world. And right here, right now, we are called to do what Jesus did 2000 years ago when he was physically on this earth: we are called to proclaim the good news that our sins are not held against us; we are called to teach and heal and forgive and do miracles in God’s name. That is our job, 24/7. Being a Christian is not a hobby, it is not a pasttime. It is not something we can pick up when we are interested and put aside when we are bored. It is who we are. It is our identity, indelibly marked on our souls by our baptism. We *are* Christ, physically present in this world.

But then you say, “Wait a minute...I don’t have time for that. I have to go to work. I have to go to the grocery store. I have to pick up the kids. I can’t go around being Christ all the time, are you kidding me? I have a life I have to live.” I know. You’re right. And that is exactly where the scientific transfer of energy I was talking about a while ago comes into play. A prayerful, committed, and generous plan of financial giving – what we would call a pledge – makes it possible for you to consecrate and sanctify your every day work and transform whatever you do into Christ’s work. When you give your money to God, your energy becomes Christ’s energy, and that is the energy that even today can still heal and forgive and save the world.

If we go through life fearfully clutching to ourselves what we’ve earned, what is ours, what we need, how will we ever open our hands enough to accept the gifts that God longs to give us? If we do open our hands in faith and generosity, yes, we might have less. But with open hands and open hearts, how much more will we be able to receive the unimaginable blessings and abundance of the Kingdom of God?

In this season of stewardship, may we all live out our lives as members of Christ’s Mystical Body on earth with open hearts and open hands and may God bless our generosity and our faith.