

Shiloh United Methodist Church

The Generous Church: Discovering Gravity

Matthew 19:16-26

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October 7, 2018

On January 4, 2015, Twitter and Facebook posts began to circulate this message:

(NASA) January 4th, 9:47 AM PST, the long awaited planetary alignment will cause a gravitational fluctuation that will leave you weightless for a short period of time #beready

The story was that British astronomer Patrick Moore predicted that on that morning, an extraordinary astronomical event would occur, no I did not say astrological, astronomical. At exactly 9:47 a.m., the planet Pluto would pass directly behind Jupiter, in relation to the Earth. This rare alignment would mean that the combined gravitational force of the two planets would exert a stronger upward gravitational pull, temporarily counteracting the Earth's own gravity and making people weigh less. The story added that people could experience the phenomenon by jumping in the air at the precise moment the alignment occurred. If they did so, Moore promised, they would experience a strange floating sensation. People all over the world lofted themselves into the air at 9:47 a.m., only to discover that they could not escape Earth's gravity so easily. It was a hoax. Since the days of Sir Isaac Newton's supposed apple incident, we have known gravity to be a constant. We don't even realize it is ordering our world right now.

Gravity is a force that is one of balance too. We have learned this as astronauts spend prolonged time in space, our bones weaken when we don't have enough. And when Gravity is too much we would not survive well either, because increased gravity would likely draw us

toward the Sun and begin to heat up the earth. There are forces at work in our lives, forces that have to maintain a proper balance for us to continue to live fully.

This balance is what Jesus was talking about in the scripture for today. When an individual approached Jesus he was hoping for a quick answer of how you get closer to God, and instead Jesus shared one of balance and consequence.

Matthew 19:16-26 - CEB

¹⁶ A man approached him and said, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal life?”

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There’s only one who is good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸ The man said, “Which ones?”

Then Jesus said, “*Don’t commit murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony.* ¹⁹ *Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.*”

²⁰ The young man replied, “I’ve kept all these. What am I still missing?”

²¹ Jesus said, “If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.”

²² But when the young man heard this, he went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I assure you that it will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ In

fact, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

²⁵ When his disciples heard this, they were stunned. "Then who can be saved?" they asked.

²⁶ Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible for human beings. But all things are possible for God."

After school the other day me and my two girls were trying to think of something fun to do outside the home. We had felt kinda cooped up with the rain and cloudiness over the past few days. Our hope was to find something that did not cost much, and the reality is that everything we hoped to do cost some money. We had to weigh together if we wanted to spend our money that way or not.

Similarly, the other night I was at home and thought I want to see how much this game I have been wanting to play is. Looking around I found it, and I could have bought it then and there, just the click of a button.

On the same page, listed were about 10 items in an advertisement for Amazon that I had considered buying at one time or another, one click and they would be on my doorstep in a few days.

TV ads pervade the shows we watch, inciting us to complete our perceived desires. All of the messages from advertisers are, "Buy this, spend money on this, and your life will feel more complete."

Jesus would say, "No, these things will not. Things do not make your life more complete."

The reality of financial gravity is more like what Jesus says, and less like the advertisers. It is why people describe lives in terms such as *house*

poor, car poor, possession poor, and cash poor to describe our existence.

The key to financial gravity is to experience the force in just the right proportion. Take a look at this video. (Show "Sermon Video 1: Harness.") All of us feel the force of our needs. These are normal things of life. As an adult, you have to figure out the income that can provide for those needs. Needs are like the weights stacked on this training sled. A short list would include food, shelter, clothing, and things that allow you to work and live, such as transportation and communication.

In the right proportion these things can move easily yoked to you, however add some additional plates. "I need that bigger car" or the "nice boat." Even adding things like "more house" or "that extra toy" can make the burden bigger and bigger. To the point we cannot even move from the weight of our burdens.

Jesus was pointing out that we can leave the economies of this world behind, if we can tether ourselves to something besides financial gravity. Over the next few weeks we are going to be talking about the importance of what we tie our lives, our hearts and even yes our pocketbooks to, or should I say plastic cards to. Defying gravity is about trusting that God will work to help us understand what we need to let go of, attach our lives to, and trust to have a full life.

Take for example this parable I found that helps describe what Jesus calls us to.

A pilgrim from earth was having a conversation with God one day. The pilgrim said, "God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.

God led the pilgrim to two doors. The pilgrim looked in the

first door. In the middle of the room was a large round table. In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew, which smelled delicious and made the pilgrim's mouth water.

But the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful. But because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The pilgrim shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering.

"That is Hell," said God.

They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew which made the pilgrim's mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

"I don't understand," said the pilgrim.

"It's simple," said God. "In this room, they have learned to feed each other."

Today is World Communion Sunday, and on this day we along with Christians around the globe take communion. It is important that we should begin to discuss generosity and stewardship on this Sunday, for the meal that Jesus called us to was about learning to feed each other the love God showed to us. This day that has been celebrated for

nearly 80 years reminds us that across the globe all Christians are connected in this ritual of blessing, receiving, and send us into the world.

As we prepare to go into the world, after learning about gravity, and how we might work with our God to defy this constant in our lives, I want to invite you to consider a few things. Then we will take communion and send you back into the world.

First, take some time to consider where gravity is building in your life, and you feel out of balance. We are going to focus on financial gravity because it is something that impacts most Americans. However, there are other forms of life gravity that may need to be tethered to God too. Consider all of these in our work.

Second, consider a cleanout challenge as we move through this series. Clean out a drawer, closet, room or area of your home in the next few weeks. See how it feels, the ease or difficulty of discarding things you no longer use will tell you a lot about the degree of financial gravity you are experiencing. If they are winter household goods, and winter clothing bring them here to the church and we will share them with the FreeStore. If there are other items cluttering up your space, look for a place to donate, recycle or discard of them.

The man who asked Jesus the question asked about eternal life, and Jesus response was not just about the eternal, but abundant life now. Over the next few weeks may we learn generosity that helps us serve one another, may we learn how to feel gravity and know when to defy it, and may we find deeper connection to our God, our savior and our the Spirit of our lives.

Blessings on our journey friends.

Shalom and Amen

Story by Sally Gill. Found at: <http://ralphmiltonsrums.blogspot.com/2009/11/preaching-materials-for-november-15.html>