

Also, the Root of Many Good Things

Amos 6:1a,4-7; I Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31, Psalm 146 9-26-2010

Mark Zuckerberg. Melinda and Bill Gates. Warren Buffet. What do these people have in common? If your answer is, "Immense wealth," you are right. If you also managed to come up with, "People involved in charitable giving," you are also correct. They are all billionaires who are tending their wealth well. They probably do love making money but they also have been attuned to the need that is all around them. They all support different, worthy causes.

Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook and a billionaire at age 26, has been in the news lately for making a \$100,000,000- matching grant challenge to Newark, New Jersey's public schools in the hopes of prodding the school system into the direction of renewal. The jury is still out on this noble experiment and will be for quite some time. We are told he would have preferred to keep this challenge grant anonymous but that he was urged to go public with what he was doing. He did this because he believes children need to be well educated to survive in the world.

These people are not the loungers described in the words from the prophet Amos: those who are self-indulgent and self-satisfied and who just lie around doing nothing to make the world a better place. Instead, they are active, vital and vibrant and involved in the world around them. They seek to give back from the river of blessings that has come their way. While the excessive love of money may be the root of all evil, money itself, wisely used, can be the root of many good things.

These people and others like them, are not at all like the rich man in this week's parable from the gospel of Luke. I doubt that any of them would drive past a person in extreme need perched on their doorstep. Jesus was cautioning those who would hear and understand, that they should not be obsessed with making and keeping money. Instead they were to look around themselves, in their own vicinity and determine how they could make their corner of the world a better place in which to dwell.

The rich man, upon seeing what his eternity would be, awakened to how it was he had gone so wrong and asked that Lazarus go to his brothers to warn them to be wise in their lives. It was too late. They had before them all the teachings they would need to live lives of kindness and generosity. If they failed to hear the words of the prophets and heed them, they would face their brother's fate. They needed to study the words of wisdom they had before them so that they would find themselves on the proper track in life.

It seems that many do know what it is we have to do when it comes to helping out people in need. The recent fire that left Eva Villanova and her family homeless, brought out the best from all sectors of Colebrook. The desire to help was immediate and was and is deeply appreciated. Eva told me to tell you that. Upon learning that everything the family had was gone, the goodness in people was urged into action and they made sure they would have what they needed to have some semblance of normalcy. Just imagine escaping a fire that left only the clothing you had on when you leapt out of bed. Imagine the terrible sense of loss after the initial shock wore off. Then, imagine an incredible number of hands reaching out to help you through such a tragedy. For many of us this might come as a surprise, as we begin to discover just how good people can be.

We do not have to be billionaires to touch others with thoughtfulness and kindness and love. We can be just who we are and decide to do things in a better way for the immediate world around us.

When we work on a project that involves other people, we do far better when we can set aside any defenses we might have and begin to understand that the work we do is for the greater good. This requires setting aside our egos and knowing that many people working well together can accomplish major things. Sometimes the work we do leaves us with sore muscles and stiff backs, but our hearts are warmed when we think of how it is we have come together to accomplish something good.

When we have the time to step back and take a look at all that has been done, and when we know that far more can be accomplished through kindness and the ability to look beyond our own selfish needs and desires, we grow into better people, inch by inch. We open doors we never thought we could and we begin to follow more closely in the footsteps of the one who came to show us the way to better serve our God. This takes time and patience, understanding, sometimes a little forgiveness, and love. But, when we are able to do this, we learn what it means to treat others in the same way we like to be treated. We put our resources to the best use possible and nod in satisfaction when a job is well done, as tired as we may be mentally and physically. And we know we are a team.

There is no lounging on ivory couches for those of us who want to keep moving along to bringing about the kingdom of God on earth, among us, within us, all around us. There are no blinders on us when we take a good look at the world and decide to begin to do something, no matter how small it may be, to make it a better place for all.

What can we do to feed the hungry families around us? What can we do to support those who are in grief? What can we do to share the wealth we possess? There is a communion hymn a congregation I used to serve would sing on every communion Sunday. It sums up what we need to do its title is: "In Remembrance." These are the words:

In Remembrance

(Ragan Courtney and Buryl Red)

*In remembrance of Me eat this bread
In remembrance of Me drink this wine
In remembrance of Me pray for the time
When God's own will is done*

*In remembrance of me heal the sick
In remembrance of me feed the poor
In remembrance of me open the door
And let your brother in, let him in*

*Take eat and be comforted
Drink and remember too
That this is my body and precious blood
Shed for you, shed for you*

*In remembrance of me always love
In remembrance of me don't look above
But in your heart, in your heart
Look in your heart for God*

*Do this in remembrance of Me
Do this in remembrance of Me
In remembrance of Me*