

Those Who Overcome the World
Joshua 24:1-4, I John 5:1-5

Today is Stewardship Sunday, which has been designated by the United Methodist Church. This morning we heard testimony by Mr. Cliff Leake that he and his wife Bonnie Leake made a will in which they have decided to donate their estate to Faith United Methodist Church at their death. His testimony gave us a powerful message on this stewardship Sunday.

Sometimes personal testimony gives us a more powerful message than a sermon does. In fact, the preaching of the church was originated from the testimony of the Disciples of Christ. The famous testimony of faith was Peter's witness at the day of Pentecost. Without testimony, preaching loses the power of its message. That's why preaching is harder than a teaching.

I had an opportunity to have a conversation with Cliff Leake at my office three weeks ago. He used to visit my office once in a while to say "Hi" to me. One day I found him walking, crossing over the bridge of Central Street, near 17th Avenue. And, he walked for 30 minutes to come to our house when we had open house. I thought that maybe he was reluctant to use his automobile because of the cost of gasoline. It seemed me that their fixed household income from social security might be very tight for them to live within. I knew that he was looking for any resources besides the social security.

So, I asked him if he knew the program of reverse mortgages, and that I would suggest that the program might be good for them. Surprisingly, he already knew about the program. But, he said that he could not apply for the reverse mortgage and get the benefit from it, because he already executed a will in which he and Bonnie have decided to donate their estate to the Faith United Methodist Church. So, he could not use his house as collateral security. I was so impressed and moved by his saying this to me. I asked him to share this testimony with you this morning.

John Wesley once said:
When the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being and placed you in this world, He placed you here not as an owner but as a steward – as such He entrusted you for a season with goods of various kinds – but the sole property of these rests in Him, nor can ever be alienated from Him. As you are not your own but His, such is likewise all you enjoy. This message is the same message of Lord Jesus.

We were put on earth to make a contribution. We weren't created just to consume resources – to eat, breathe, and take up space. God designated us to make a difference with our lives. We were created to add to life on earth, not just take from it. God wants us to give something back. That is what is meant by stewardship. We were placed on this planet for a special assignment.

Jeremiah heard this message from the Lord God; “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

It is our affirmation of faith that God sent us Christ who died for our sins through the crucifixion and God paid a great price for us.

God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God. God gave us a significant assignment. Accept your assignment of servant-ship. We are all servants of the Lord Jesus. Servants think like stewards not owners. No servant can serve two masters.... You cannot serve both God and Money.

“If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches” (Luke 16:11)

I heard that the United States had at one time a Time of Recession from 1929 through 1942. At that time, President Franklin Roosevelt gave an address in 1933. “This country now is in a time of economic recession. But don’t be afraid of this. The fear we have is fear itself.” He saw that the worst fearfulness is not economic bankruptcy but the bankruptcy of faith.

The causes of the bankruptcy of faith are mainly three elements. First, we bankrupt our faith because our eyes are seeking something in world. Secondly, we bankrupt our faith because we are used to comparing ourselves with others. Thirdly, we bankrupt our faith because we are too busy worrying about the future.

The only thing we can do to overcome the world is to focus on Christ who won the world. Trust and love the Lord Almighty whenever we are facing problems.

I would like to share my story. I have served one church for twenty eight years in Denver, Colorado. I have had many experiences through my ministry in that church. About ten years ago, the church had to make a big decision in the matter of relocation. The church was located in a rough, inner-city Hispanic area near down town Denver. It was huge. Asbury United Methodist Church was one hundred twenty years old, built in sandstone, and an awesome building. One time that church was one of the big churches in the Denver area. The church has a grand pipe organ and the building was designated one of Denver’s historical landmarks. Fourteen years ago, the building was given to the Korean congregation by the Rocky Mountain Conference. The problem was that the exorbitant cost of proper maintenance, and frequent vandalism in the neighborhood. The expense of heating was more than two thousand dollars a month in the winter.

The most problem was the location. There were no Korean Americans living within 30 miles from the church. The dominant population of the neighborhood in

which the church was located was Hispanic. The church had had frequent experience with vandalisms, stolen items, cars damaged in the parking lot, and at last, even full blown arson. These were that reasons that were raised in defense of an argument for the relocation of the church among the members for a long time. Fortunately, the church was able to get permission to sell the property from the Rocky Mountain Conference of United Methodist Church. So, the church managed to sell the property for \$550,000. Then, we had to move out from the building and rent a space for the congregation while a new building was being sought out to purchase.

It took a year to find a church on the market. Finally, we found a church, in the best location and only thirty years old. It was a very good looking church. But, there was a problem in the price of the church. The price was one million and four hundred thousand dollars. We had only five hundreds fifty thousand dollars in the bank. We were nine hundred thousand dollars short. We started a capital campaign. At that time my salary was twenty two hundred dollars a month, and that included everything. Sun and I were the first to pledge to the capital campaign. We pledged thirty six thousand dollars for three years, which means a little less than half of my salary would be offered to the church each month. The congregation came together to pledge two hundred fifty thousand dollars, over a three year period, among eighty members church.

The other story related to the relocation of the church was the activity of the prayer groups. Every Saturday morning we had always had prayer meeting at 6:00 a.m. One Saturday morning after prayer meeting, and after having breakfast at Einstein Bagels, we, ten members of the prayer group, went to the prospective church which we hoped to purchase. We asked to enter the sanctuary and we lined up single-file, and then we marched. I led the line of 10 prayer group members, and we walked around in the sanctuary seven times, clapping hands and singing songs of praise. Like Joshua's army in the Old Testament to defeat Jericho. After this visit to the church, the church decided to sell to us. At that time my church was the third on a waiting list on the bidding!

Another story in relation to my pledge for the capital campaign of the church goes like this. My family had been surviving without one thousand dollars from normal income for three years, since that much had been dedicated to the capital campaign. After three years, one day we had an opportunity to offer to buy a house near by the church parsonage. The price was very cheap for the property the two thousand seven hundred squared feet of property: one hundred fifty thousand dollars. With our daughter Alice's help with five thousand dollars down payment, we could purchase the house. We rented the house and the rent money could cover the mortgage payment. After seven years since we purchased the house, the value of the house was raised up to two hundred eighty thousand dollars without any effort on our part. We need to pay the mortgage payment for eight years more. I think after eight years later, the value of the house will be more than three hundred sixty thousand dollars, which is ten

times the amount Sun and I pledged, on faith alone, to the capital campaign: thirty six thousand dollars.

Compared with our pledge of thirty six thousand dollars, the house that God blessed and gave to us is about ten times the value, even in purely monetary terms. We were, unexpectedly, able to purchase a house without any extra effort from us. This is my story of pledge experience. I enjoy my pledge to God because God is always good to me. You may say, "You are a minister so you could make your pledge so easily, but we are not ministers and we could not commit that easily." I understand that but, here is a story. Listen!

A family of a minister has just moved to a new town and the preacher's small boy is getting acquainted with another boy.

The other boy asks: "What does your dad do for a living?"

He preacher's kid answers proudly, "He's a minister-ordained!"

The other boy, not to be outdone, proudly replies, "Well, my dad's in the hardware business-ordained!"

Now, that little boy unknowingly put his finger on the truth. The truth is that all Christians - whether in the hardware business or the ordained ministry- are called of God to minister in Christ's name. We are all called to be ministers!

I have another interesting story too.

A mother went upstairs to wake her son one Sunday morning. She said to him, "Get up and get ready now. It's almost time to go to church. Rise and shine!

He pulled the covers up over his shoulder and turned away. "I don't want to go today."

She said, "Come on, son, we always go to church."

He answered, "I'm tired. I want to seep in. Sunday morning is the only time I get to sleep in."

"You can sleep some other time. We are going to church today," she told him. With that, the son bolted upright. "Give me one good reason why we need to go church today!"

"I'll give you three reasons," she replied. "First of all, it's good for you. Second, it's a habit in our family. We always go to church! And third, you are the minister!"

Brothers and sisters in Christ! Don't ask why should you pledge. Because, we already have the three same reasons to pledge. First, it's a way of blessing from God to us. Second, all the high standard Christians do pledge. And last, you are the ministers too.

Today's scripture reading 1 John 5:1-5, reminds us that to love God is to obey His commands and his commands are not burdensome, rather these are the power of overcoming the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son.

This morning we heard Joshua's claim to the people of God in Joshua 24:1-4. Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Joshua told the history of Israel to them.

"Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt."

And Joshua demanded to the people of God.

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God."

But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord."

Unknowingly we have been worshiping the idol of money. We have been slaves of money, which is what the old forefathers worshipped beyond the River.

We are not called to be slaves of money. We should and can overcome the life of slavery to money. We are heading toward crossing over the River of the land of God's promise. We are the servants of God whose land is eternity.

Can you serve the Lord with all your heart?

Yes, we can.

Can you obey the Lord's command?

Yes, we can

Can you decide what the Lord wants us to do?

Yes, we can.