

Sunday, November 10, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon

I grew up worrying about money – not in a negative way – just in a front of the mind awareness sort of way.

I was always working to save money for something – clothes, skis, college, furniture, a car.

It wasn't that my family didn't have money – it was just that my father's income was based on commission, so sometimes there was a lot of money and sometimes there was none.

My parents had two approaches to this.

From my mother's perspective, we were always hovering on the abyss of poverty.

From my father's perspective, the next big payoff was just around the corner.

There was always the threat of scarcity.

I knew little about managing money or having investments.

As far as we knew – you worked for money to pay the bills of daily living.

My world simply did not include anyone who had money they had not earned themselves.

It was not until I was in college that I was aware of anyone who had inherited money.

The concept of a trust fund was new to me.

I was fascinated by my college friends who had money they had not technically earned.

I think what intrigued me the most was my friend's ability to view money from a perspective of abundance rather than the notion of scarcity that I had been raised with.

Those who had an inheritance seemed to have less anxiety about their futures.

There was a certainty of stability.

Our own perspectives about money are formed in those childhood and young adult experiences.

How about you?

What perspective on money did you inherit from your family?

What perspective have you passed on to your children?

When I say the word *inheritance* I think that most people's first thought is of money.

Perhaps you envision royalty, titles, property and prestige being passed on from one generation to the next.

That type of inheritance requires work to maintain – a business, or an estate comes with responsibility.

Perhaps you think about the traits or values you have inherited from your family.

Did your blue eyes or blonde hair come from an ancestor?

Sometimes people attribute their artistic or musical inclinations to their forbearers.

That type of inheritance is a part of us, often one that we can do little about.

But our readings this morning speak to something deeper – something less tangible than titles or money or hair color.

Our scriptures describe a certainty that comes with knowing that the promises God made to our ancestors have been and will continue to be fulfilled.

The psalmist promises that those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land and the writer of 1st Kings asserts that the people will prosper and have needed rain on the land that God has given to his people.

Both of these characterizations of inheritance speak of the certainty and confidence one experiences when you know that you are where you belong and that you have every right to be there.

In biblical times, as well as today, the right to land conveys permanence, stability, a home.

This, however, is just the start

In the letter to the Ephesians, the writer reminds his readers that God has bestowed an inheritance upon them – one of spiritual blessing, a designation of being holy and blameless before God in love.

God has bestowed the ultimate inheritance in gifting us with the being of Jesus Christ – calling us beloved.

This is an inheritance that we are called to care for—one that comes with responsibility.

God expects us, as his adopted children, to live up to the promise of forgiveness and grace.

The author of Ephesians refers to God's gift of grace as a lavish inheritance.

Something we didn't earn, but which is gifted to us.

We must actively receive this gift of God's grace.

We must decide what to do with this gift – how to use it wisely, for good.

Stories abound, both in scripture as well as our daily newspapers about wealth squandered – someone’s inheritance frittered away.

Today, I want to draw our attention to two different inheritances which we have received.

The first inheritance that I want to mention is that of our Veterans.

From the millions of men and women who have defended this nation of ours since our founding – to the nearly one and a half million active military personnel serving today, we embrace our responsibility to live by the values these men and woman fought to defend.

The second inheritance that I want to celebrate is this beautiful building and the resources that have been endowed to support and sustain it.

I want to share with you excerpts from *The Centennial Anniversary of the Erection of the House of Worship of the Congregational Church, Salisbury CT, dated November 30, 1900.*

The first speaker was Thomas Lot Norton – church elder and Sunday school superintendent for 21 years:

“On an occasion like this, it may be said that, in a real sense three congregations are present.

The living congregation is here, those whom we meet from day to day, our friends and neighbors, those from other bodies of Christians, following with us a common Lord, worshipping with us at a common altar.

Then we look forward a century hence and summon from its shadowy frontier the congregation that is to be.

We wonder how they will live, dress, travel and worship, what books read, what questions discuss, what problems solve, what government obey.

But most of all our thoughts go back with loving memories to the congregation that has been

As the time is short, I will dwell upon one characteristic only of that by-gone generation using one word to describe it, *austerity*.

Our fathers were austere men.

They showed it in their houses of worship of which this is a type;

they showed it in their forms of worship;

they showed it in their religious thought, their theology.

They were austere in their dress, in their conversation, in their family life. ...

For the congregation of today we may use the word *prosperity* to indicate what we have, not what we are.

In all things that make for material prosperity we are far in advance of the men of 1800...

There is scarcely a family in Salisbury, no matter how limited its income, who would be content to live as did the well-to-do farmers of 1800.

Prosperity in things mental is a no less marked characteristic of the present generation. ...

Now, if austerity may be called the word of 1800 and prosperity the word of 1900, surely the word of 2000 must be *temerity*.

Boldness approaching rashness marks the trend of thought, invention, engineering, business, science, theology.

Vast combinations of capital involving fabulous sums of money are unfolding schemes which make us dizzy.”

Our ancestor, Mr. Norton knew of what he spoke.

The Reverend John Calvin Goddard offered these words on the occasion:

“Our fathers, in erecting this sanctuary, did not purpose to make it like the temple of Solomon, “exceeding magnificent,” but they did design it to be exceeding strong.

So the Deacon inquired of the village folk

Where he could find the strongest oak,

That couldn't be split, nor bent, nor broke.

That was put into the sills and posts, making its frame strong as structural steel, giving it a heart of oak and a green old age.

Time has only confirmed the wisdom of their choice....

In this church building more than a thousand persons have accepted the vows of God.

Here also more than a hundred thousand dollars have been paid into the Lord's treasury....

Rev. Goddard continued, “A church is a city of refuge, where driven souls may take hold of the altar's horns and be secure.

It is a state line, the meeting point of two worlds.

It is a house of mercy...

It is to us also hallowed ground. ...

It is hallowed to us most of all, because visited by Our Lord, who maketh the place of His feet glorious.

His presence has been felt here, the hem of His garment has been touched, at the things concerning Himself our hearts have burned within us, and here He has been known of us in the breaking of the bread.

It is for His sake that we feel in this sanctuary the force of that reverent injunction, "Take thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

So, my friends we gather here in this sacred space 213 years after the first group gathered and we understand what we have inherited.

We recognize and embrace our responsibility to care for this asset, as well as others bequeathed to us over the years.

We are part of something much larger than ourselves.

We must be cognizant of our past, as well as our future.

Each one of us is an heir.

An heir to the promise of God's grace, an heir to the responsibility of ensuring that this church will be here one hundred years hence and an heir to supporting and sustaining one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

As this is our second Sunday of the month, it is time for a brief discussion.

I pose to you these two questions:

1. What is our greatest challenge in sustaining the life of our church for generations to come? *Money, Faith, Mission?*
2. *Is temerity the correct description for our generation?*

Let us pray.

Gracious, loving God of our ancestors, we thank you for the blessings you have bestowed upon us.

We are grateful recipients of the inheritance you provide.

Help us to see the importance of all that has come before us, as well as the imperative of creating a future for those who will come after us.

Grant us the grace to be generous with our resources.

We offer thanks for those men and women who have served our country, and who are actively serving today.

May their courage be rewarded by peace.

We pray this day for those among us in need of healing. We pray for Kathy, Ann, Patricia, Barbara, Mark, Alvord, Theresa, Don, Claude, Betsy, Julia, Richard, Peter, Michele, Warren, Jane, Caregivers.

May each one know the comfort that you bring.

We pray for those who grieve; that our love might ease their pain.

We pray for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who live in fear, without hope.

May your light shine brightly into their darkness.

We pray for those affected by natural disasters, particularly the victims of the typhoon in the Phillipines.

May your grace and peace find its way to their communities.

Hear us now in the sacred stillness of this Meetinghouse as we turn our hearts to you. ...

Jesus taught them to pray in these words....Our Father