

## **“Making a Commitment”**

Date: November 13, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Mark 12:41-44; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Occasion: Commitment Sunday, Capital Campaign

Themes: Commitment, Stewardship

A little humor before we get too serious? So, a man texted his girlfriend: “Susie, I love you so much. I would climb the highest mountain, cross the driest desert, sail the most tempestuous sea for you. I’ll see you Sunday, if it doesn’t rain.”

His commitment level wasn’t too strong, was it? Consider instead this story, about a young musician who approached an old piano master, who had just completed the most beautiful rendition of a complex collection of great compositions he had ever heard.

“Sir,” the young man said admiringly, “it must be great to have all the practicing behind you, and be able to simply sit down and play like that.”

“Oh,” the older piano maestro replied, “I still practice eight hours every day.” “But, why? I mean..... you’re so good!” exclaimed the young musician.

“I wish to become superb!” answered the old man.

Welcome to Commitment Sunday at Lakewood United Methodist Church, where in a few minutes we will be asking you to make a commitment to the future of our beloved church. We are a good church, would you agree? But like the old piano master, I ask, “Don’t we want to be superb?”

I for one believe that Lakewood has a great and glorious future ahead of it. I believe our best days are not behind us, but ahead of us. I believe in the future of this congregation. I think you’re great.

Retired United Methodist pastor Brian Bauknight tells about a resident of Maine he knew, who told him this story. He told Rev. Bauknight his little hometown was deliberately flooded, as part of the Army Corps of Engineers' project, to build a sizeable dam.

The man said the most painful part of the experience, aside from the relocation, was watching his town die. Brian's friend told him that all improvements and repairs stopped. Why paint a house that was soon to be covered with water?

Why repair a building when the whole town was to be wiped out? Why worry about rubbish and potholes in the streets or graffiti on the walls? Week after week, the whole town became more bedraggled and run down.

The sad truth is: When there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present. But God has given you and me a sure and certain faith in the future. Our church is strong and growing stronger. The fruit of our faith in God is an eagerness to keep running the good race, to dream boldly, and to keep the faith.

The board of trustees and the capital campaign committee have laid before us a bold dream of necessary repairs, renovations and renewals that will keep our base of ministry strong for another generation or longer. It is a bold dream. They are dreaming big.

Perhaps some of you have said to yourselves, "why so much? Why not just paint a room here and there and do some minor cosmetic repairs? Why so much?" I have several responses.

First of all, we believe these recommendations are not merely minor cosmetic touch-ups. We believe they are necessary to maintain the integrity of the building, and to provide a warm and

welcoming place for people to gather for worship, study, fellowship, mission and ministry. We haven't done anything significant to maintain or upgrade our facilities for over 30 years. It is our time.

Wayne Barrett, a church finance consultant writes, "Once in every Christian's lifetime he or she ought to have the opportunity and the challenge to help build or renovate a church. In today's congregations, many of our members have never seriously been a part of the excitement of a building program."

"They came into a church that was already there; they have lived and matured in a church that already existed. It met their needs and continues to meet their needs, but they have the priceless opportunity to build a church that will meet the needs of others yet to come." Note those last words – *yet to come*. That is our opportunity.

"But why so much? \$400,000 is a lot of money." Another story: A lady once complained to her friend, "Our church costs too much. They're always asking for money."

"Look at it this way," her friend replied. "When my baby was born years ago, he cost us a lot of money. He continued to cost us money as he grew up. But in his senior year, he died. Since the funeral, he hasn't cost us a penny. Which situation do you think I'd rather have?"

"As long as our church lives," she concluded, "it will cost. When it dies for lack of support, it will cost nothing. Therefore, I'm going to give and pray with everything I've got to keep it alive."

Remember that piano virtuoso, who didn't want to be simply good, he wanted to be superb? Lakewood has the opportunity to grow into an outstanding community of faith, yes, a superb church.

We have what it takes. We need your support. I'm sure we could all find excuses as to why we can't or don't want to support the capital campaign. But consider this quote:

“Excuses are the enemies of excellence, the marks of mediocrity, and the forerunner of failure. The keys to achievement are enthusiasm and commitment.”

Friends, we can all make excuses, or we can support this capital campaign with our enthusiasm and our commitment. I believe in you. I believe we can do this. I am whole-heartedly committed and enthusiastic for the success of this campaign.

In a few minutes, you will be asked to complete and then bring to the altar your pledge card that was mailed to you. Or, one of the ushers can give you one. How will you decide what you will give, above and beyond your regular level of support to the church?

Hear this, friends: we don't want you to drop your giving for current expenses. We still have a church to operate and ministry that needs to be done in the name of Jesus Christ. This is second mile giving, going above and beyond what you already give; it is not meant to replace what you now give.

Consider the widow in the Gospel lesson from Mark. She didn't put a lot of money in the offering plate in front of Jesus. Yet, Jesus praises her for her gift and her commitment. She was willing to trust God to take care of her needs, after she gave her last two copper pennies. She loved the Lord so much, she wanted to give generously.

Paul tells the church in Corinth that God loves a cheerful giver. It is our hope and prayer that as you make your decision as to what to

pledge, you will consider it a joy and a blessing to give to this campaign, and not a burden or a duty.

Paul also tells that same church, that when we give we will reap the blessings we sow. If we give sparingly, we will reap sparingly. If we give generously, we will receive abundant blessings. Paul also goes on to tell the Corinthians, and I believe it is excellent advice for Lakewoodians:

“Each person should give what he or she has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or out of a sense of guilt or obligation.”

It is my hope and prayer, that on this Consecration Sunday, we will receive generous pledges that will abundantly fund the necessary work to be done here at Lakewood.

My beloved Lakewoodians, we need to give gifts for the construction, care and maintenance of the meeting place of the people of God. We need to give good gifts. A good gift is a gift that blesses the giver, because we grow spiritually when we give as generously as we can.

I invite you to give. Give a good gift. Give so that the next generation may know that Lakewood was not and is not just an “ok” church, not just a good church, but Lakewood is a superb church, for the glory of God. Amen? Amen.

Resources cited:

*Right on the Money – Messages for Spiritual Growth Through Giving*, by Brian K. Bauknight. Discipleship Resources: Nashville, TN, 1995.

*The Church Finance Idea Book*, by Wayne C. Barrett. Discipleship Resources: Nashville, TN, 1989.