

**2013 Quaker Fundraisers Gathering
September 29, 2013
Marriott at Penn Square, Lancaster, Pennsylvania
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Good evening, Friends! I want to thank Friends Fiduciary and Jeff Perkins for the invitation to be with you tonight. Jeff contacted me recently and asked for both some bio information and if there was something interesting I might want to share about myself. Bio information alone isn't often very interesting, is it? Well, I told Jeff and he just mentioned I enjoy whitewater rafting but do not get to do it very often. Just to prove I have actually rafted, I brought along a few slides of a trip along the Nile. I was in Uganda to speak at a gathering of Friends pastors in 2010 and had taken my son along with me. Before we left the country, we went on a day-long trip through the headwaters of the Nile. Here are a few slides:



At the beginning, things started out nice and easy...



Before too long, the situation was rather turbulent...



Then, it was completely out of control...



Only to wind up in this position...more than once.

As I was reviewing these photos for tonight, I decided they actually captured my experience as both a fundraiser and leading Quaker organizations, as well! Maybe I ought to just end here, so good night and thanks for coming!

Actually, I have wanted to attend this gathering for many years but have never been able to quite get it on my calendar. I am a novice in the ministry of fundraising and need the help and influence of Friends like you who have so much more experience and expertise than I do. So I confess feeling quite humbled and a bit nervous about being invited to speak to you this evening, especially on a topic like "*Faith and Money.*" ***Faith OR Money.***...sounds a bit easier to me. At different points in my life, ***Faith IN Money*** might be a more honest description of a topic I can speak knowledgeably on... But here we are...

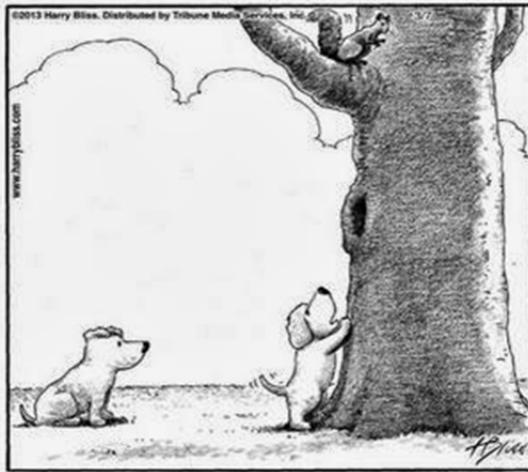
The bible, of course, is brimming with stories, sermons and admonitions about the relationship between faith and money. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the subject of wealth/poverty is the second most dominate theme...edged out only by idolatry. Not surprisingly, these two issues often wind up entangled in a great wrestling match that shapes the content and character of God's people. Will the chosen ones live in radical fidelity with the God who has called them to be a blessing to all the nations or will they prostitute themselves with whatever gods they think will insure their own comfort, security and independence? In the end, one choice naturally manifests in an expression of justice and compassion...the other bends them toward injustice and oppression.

In the New Testament, somewhere around 1 out of every 16 verses has to do with wealth...and not around God demanding our offerings. Rather the focus is on how our use of wealth is a direct expression of our faith. In the first three Gospels—those books most directly connected to the work and words of Jesus—one of out of every 10 verses circles around this theme. In Luke the ratio falls to about one in 7. To me, this is a good reason to avoid the book of Luke as much as possible...

Over and over again, Scripture makes clear that one of the most reliable gauges of the human heart's condition is seen in our relationship to wealth. Are we enslaved to it, dominated by our need to have more or our fear of having less? Or are we liberated from this...set free to use our wealth in a way that reflects our fidelity to God and commitment to others?

Well, often the Bible talks about these questions and the accompanying choices in simple ways. Jesus, for example, in the Luke 12 passage used as a theme verse for this gathering says: ***Therefore I tell you, don't worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear...But seek first God's Kingdom, and all these things will be given to you as well... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*** No problem, huh!?! It is all so simple—chase freedom in God rather than slavery to stuff—and everything in life will find its right order...

Well, I don't know about all of you, but I find this *deeply challenging*. It reminds me of a cartoon another Friend sent me last year when we were commiserating about the challenges of being a good leader of Friends.



"True, it isn't 'rocket science,'
Ted. But it's still really difficult."

The whole proposition is just harder than it sounds, at least for novices in the faith like me. Maybe no one else here finds integrating faith and money into your life a challenge. But if so, maybe this is why so much time is spent on this topic in the Scriptures.

So there is this wrestling match around faith—that is, our absolute trust in the Living God for each and every moment our lives—and money, which we either serve as a rival God or use in the service of God. As I read the biblical text and as it has been repeatedly validated in the lives of people I meet, this is one of the great challenges common to all

humanity. Rich or poor—it is a challenge. And now in the midst of this great human struggle, people like us show up—Fundraisers—encouraging generosity, asking people to support the causes we love, wooing people toward stewardship and faithfulness. And we do this, even as many of us are still sorting out our own relationship issues between faith and money. How to do this with integrity? Without treating others as a means to our goals? With any sense of a pure heart?

Now just so you know, my background is not in fundraising. Before becoming a church bureaucrat...er... administrator about 10 years ago, I was pastor/preacher for most of the 20 years prior. That earlier work is closer to my own sense of giftedness and call and I recognize how it often shapes and directs the way I wind up approaching many situations and concerns.

One of my favorite books on preaching was written by a fellow named Fred Craddock. In the book, with its wildly creative title—*Preaching*—Craddock says something more formative to me than any of the mechanical suggestions he offers about how to preach. I share this quote from the book with you, because I see a deep correlation between how he describes the approach to and potential impact of preaching ...to what I see at the heart of fundraising from a faith perspective:

“Jesus will bring truth to light and in doing so throws all who come in contact with him into a crisis of decision. In that decision, rising & falling, life & death, result. Jesus precipitates the centrally important movement of one's life toward or away from God. As much as we may wish to join the name of Jesus only to the positive, satisfying & blessed in life, the inescapable fact is that anyone who turns on light creates shadows. This is what is meant literally by “making a difference,” and it is this reality which causes many to take up the task of preaching (*and fundraising?*) with great hesitation. **After all, who would casually become an accessory in the radical alteration of the lives of others?**”

The work we do from a spiritual perspective really has little to do with raising funds for our respective organizations. At a much deeper level, what we do is about the transformation of lives and formation of a community more deeply resembling the heart of God. It is about the liberating people from slavery to fear, to stuff, to anxiety and releasing people's passions, concerns *and wealth* in a way that God's good will is done on earth...just as it is intended in heaven. The spiritual work we do with people is about revolutionizing lives and influencing history, as new values and

transformed world views lead to decisions and actions that are radically different than ones people might have previously even considered. And as I think about it from this perspective, I am mindful I dare not do this work casually.

For most of us, this kind of transformation is like having your life turned inside out and upside down. What I am referring to, of course, is altogether different than lightening someone's bank account by a few hundred or a few thousand dollars. Instead, this is about liberation—helping people find freedom from themselves, their fears, their demons. It is about interrupting the regularly scheduled program so many of us are dialed into in order to embrace and engage the world in a whole new way. And Ted, getting that to happen may not sound like rocket—but *it is really difficult* to let go of the old in order to be embraced by something so new. For most of us, at least when we are honest with ourselves, it plain scares us to death.

And so, we dare not approach this work casually because we are, indeed, talking about the radical alteration of lives. We are encouraging people to say “yes” to God and to the needs of others rather than just their own needs. In the work of inviting people to let their faith shape their relationship to wealth rather than allowing wealth to dictate the depth and direction of their faith, we are daring to shine a little bit of light into their situation. Brought with skill and compassion, this light can illuminate, liberate and transform a person. It might lead to their healing, to their conversion, to a whole new way of being—which is powerful and heady stuff. Approached carefully rather than casually, with reverence and humility, the work you do as fundraisers is really about some of most core issues of the human heart.

But alongside that capacity for great good comes...what? The capacity for great harm. The opportunity to manipulate, to coerce, to crush rather than care for the soul of another. For that same light, which can illuminate and comfort and create peace, is equally able to blind, frighten and harm others if we are not careful...at least by those of us whose hearts are not yet pure.

I suspect most of you have read Henri Nouwen's wonderful little book, *The Spirituality of Fundraising*. In it, he writes:

Those of us who ask for money need to look carefully at ourselves. The question is not how to get money. Rather, the question is about our relationship with money. We will never be able to ask for money if we do not know how we ourselves relate to money. What is the place of money in our lives?

Well, as I said for me, this is a challenging issue. Now part of what drew me to Quakers in the 1980's was the testimony around simplicity. My wife and I were newly married and just starting our family when we began worshipping with Friends. Our convictions about what simplicity ought to look like for us at the time were shaped not only by our sense of faithfulness, but in all honesty, by the fact we had very little money. I had not yet begun my career working for Quaker organizations and so had not yet amassed the great wealth one does after a few years of working for Friends...

But in those early days, I kept getting asked to talk on the simplicity—what it means; what it might mean to focus exclusively on the Kingdom of God; to allow the content and character of our lives to be informed by our devotion to God rather than being addicted and devoted to money and stuff; how to live in right relationship with others and creation; how to be lavishly generous, especially in a world of such crying need. All great topics to explore and made easier in part (at least for me) by the fact we really had very little to live on.

But over time, we did have more. Suddenly, I began to be confronted by the notion that the thing that often makes us conservative is...we have a lot to conserve! Light was beginning to expose the *actual condition* of my heart, which to that point was partially obscured by our circumstances.

What challenged me most in those days, however, was the growing recognition that how much one had at their disposal was no final determiner about the intensity and depth of their faithfulness. Some of the wealthy Friends I was beginning to meet were far more generous, far more liberated from the power of money than I was—and not simply because they could afford to be. At the same time, I was finding that voluntary simplicity was no indicator of a liberated heart. In fact, some of the most miserly and miserable people I was around were those who made simplicity an outward badge of faith they expected others to wear in exactly the same fashion.

A moment of clarity—a thin place—where God’s light was intensely and directly shined into my life occurred when I was in Peru/Bolivia in the 1990’s. I had gone there as part of a team of Friends to start a small, alternative trade organization with Quakers who lived on the altiplano. These artisans were among the Aymara people and they made beautiful sweaters and weavings from alpaca and llama wool. Our goal was to sell their products in the US in the hope of helping them rise out of some intense and severe poverty.

The four of us left for Peru and Bolivia with about \$10,000 in cash in order to purchase some equipment and buy the products. The other two members of the group wanted no part of carrying the money, however, and so I was elected as guardian of the cash. I assumed it was because I was the most imposing figure. After all, what thief would dare tangle with someone like me? Only later did I entertain the possibility that maybe I was the most disposable member of the group...

Anyway, we spent a few days in Lima meeting with Friends before heading into the mountains. In those days, Lima was a city teeming with people. In that section of the city, the streets were crowded with pedestrians, littered with garbage and choked by exhaust fumes. It smelled like a garage night with the door closed & a car running. As we were making our way through the city one day, I noticed a small little boy sitting in the middle of the cracked sidewalk. He was all alone...right *there*... under the feet of all those people bustling and crowding along the busy street.

There he sat, his vacant eyes staring off into nowhere while he strummed a battered ukulele with only two strings. He just sat there strumming a make believe song that no one was hearing. A small plastic cup sat in front of him with two, small Peruvian coins. I’m sure his mama was somewhere in the vicinity—but I couldn’t see her.

Up to that point in my life, I had taken several classes on issues of poverty and economic justice. I had been involved in hunger related ministries. I thought I knew a good bit about that topic and it was a heartfelt spiritual concern for me. But there, in that moment, something transformative happened for me—because now I was staring into the *face of poverty*—*a real face*. Something shifted in me in that moment in time, and the *concern* deepened became something more akin to *compassion*. But more than my own emotion in that moment, I experienced an inkling of God’s mercy for that small child and others like him.

More than ever before, I *felt something of the weight* of poverty that little boy carries on his shoulders every day. He was not a statistic—he was a child of God—flesh and bones—about to be crushed by the burden of poverty. When I *saw* that little boy, I realized he was invisible to almost everyone around him and within a world that is too busy or not interested to look into the face of poverty. And, as I said, it moved me with compassion. You know, that little boy still comes to mind almost every week since that day nearly 20 years ago. He reminds me there are many invisible people all throughout the world—ones I have seen hunting through garbage dumps in India for food, living as prostitutes in Africa, living in squalor in your town and mine.

The great miracle that day, however, was something altogether different. At a much deeper level than I had ever experienced before, I also *felt the weight of materialism* I carry every day on my shoulders. There I was carrying around more money than that little boy or his family would ever see in their lifetimes—and it cracked something open in my own soul. Light exposed a broken place...but in a healing way. I recognized the twin burdens—both very real—we humans share

around wealth and poverty. In world where God envisions “enoughness” for all—neither too much or too little—we were often out of sorts. His burden was a matter of physical life & death. Mine was more of the soul—a spiritual matter of life & death. But rather than feeling this burden as a judgment or a barrier, what I experienced was a wave of compassion. That same Source of mercy which loved that little boy and longed so deeply to transform his experience...was reaching toward me and others like me who carry a different burden.

Well, that experience made me far more compassionate toward those with wealth than I had ever been before. There is a burden—both an opportunity and responsibility—that comes with wealth. It may manifest in fear, in loneliness, in isolation, in guilt, in feeling judged and used by others—maybe even especially in our Quaker circles—where some of us are so certain about what simplicity *is supposed to* look like. I understand something of those feelings—much more than I understand the gnawing, relentless pain of hunger or the despair that comes from having no security. And though I desperately want to be an agent of change for those in material poverty, I get from my own experience the equally important opportunity and need to minister gracefully and compassionately from those who are sagging under the weight and strain of excess.

As I keep wrestling with God around matters of faith, right relationship with wealth and my own spiritual poverty, I feel a deep sense of conviction about carefully and compassionately ushering people toward encounters with the light of God. These encounters have the potential to radically alter the way they see themselves, others and the world in which they live. In the work I do for Friends United Meeting, I don’t ultimately want it all to be about increasing our annual fund or making sure our capital campaign goals are meeting or our Field Staff are fully supported. Those things **matter** and they are part of my responsibility to the organization and community I serve and lead. Let me say it again—those things matter. But they do not matter *ultimately* and they dare not drive the interactions I have with others.

Well, I expect these musings are all pretty basic to those of you who have been doing this work for a long time. You have cultivated the ability to raise funds and promote faithful stewardship with a deep sense of integrity, I am sure. I believe this because I watch how some of you operate and I see the difference between your approach and others that appear to lack integrity or feel slimy and manipulative in their approach to others.

For me, I recognize three ways I need to continue to work at the integration of faith and money, especially around the ministry of fundraising and helping others encounter God’s Light in the process.

The first is around my own need to honestly face into the hold wealth may have over my life rather than the liberation that comes in faithfully following Christ. Where does my treasure lie? And can I expect to lead anyone else to a place of liberation if I have not yet journeyed there? In the work of fundraising, I want to be honest about my anxieties around wealth, whether they relate to home finances or organizational needs, and work at releasing those to God’s care regularly and relentlessly. I find this helps me relate to others more truthfully and with great understanding.

Second, as I meet with people, I am trying to practice something I see so consistently lived out by Jesus in the New Testament. It is one of his greatest, but often missed miracles—his ability to see invisible people. Over and over again, Jesus sees people others overlook, neglect, shy away from, turn their backs on. If you read the gospels, and I suggest you do, you’ll also notice how instinctively he moves toward these same people with compassion. He *sees them*...sees to the core of their situation...and moves toward them with compassion...eventually for the sake of their healing. Sometimes the healing is physical, sometimes it is different than the person expects or may even want, but they are healed nonetheless. In my interactions with Friends, even the role of fundraiser, I

am trying to be on the lookout for the invisible ones, whether wealthy or poor, for there may be something important waiting to be exposed, healed and restored in their souls.

And finally, despite the serious way I've encouraged us to engage people around wealth and transformation, what I am most struck by is that the liberation of our hearts and lives to God ought to be seen in a deep and abiding joy. ***It is all about joy.***...and I want all who are connected to FUM's work to see and experience it as the increase of joy.

In the writings of the Apostle Paul, one of the underlying back-stories is his urgent concern for the believers in Jerusalem. The first Christian converts from Judaism were rapidly growing in number but also slowly being cut off from their families and support networks because of their new-found faith in Messiah. Resources and access to work were less available. To make matters worse, a famine was spreading throughout the area—and their situation was becoming dire.

Paul was busy gathering a collection from among the scattered churches to aid the group in Jerusalem. He had written the church in Corinth once before about this matter but their response was pretty lame. Frankly, I think they were pre-occupied with other matters—ones you can read about in I Corinthians. I think it is fair to say Mammon, not God, was the focus of their hearts and minds.

But this time around, something significant had happened in the life of the church in Corinth. They had undergone a change of heart, and this time, as Paul re-approaches them about participating in this chance to help others they respond eagerly. What I love about passage is the way Paul describes the heart and art of giving. Here is how it reads in 2Corinthians 9:6-15:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each one should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work...

Now God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Paul would have been a terrible television evangelist. You will notice there is no promise of increased wealth or financial independence for those who give, is there? What is promised is that God will give us just what we need *to do good*. We will have enough to do good. As we practice generosity—and it does take practice, doesn't it?—thanks and overflowing praise will be given to God. Overflowing thanks and praise will be given to God—not us. On my best days, in my best moments, this is really all I want and what I think we all really want at the core of our souls. We give not for our own glory, but as an act of worship to the God we love. And just as important, when this kind of giving occurs, community gets created. For in the giving and in the receiving, people's hearts and lives are connected to one another. They get intertwined. Inter-dependence, rather than self-reliance is fostered. And isn't this also what life in God is all about...and what so many of us hunger and long to experience?

There is a bit of a hidden jewel in this passage, as well, where Paul reminds the church in Corinth that God loves a “cheerful giver.” Literally he writes that God loves a “hilarious giver.” The particular Greek word he uses for “cheerful” is the root for our word “hilarious.” To be a hilarious giver isn’t about being goofy, of course, but rather much more about living in an open-handed and open-hearted way. It is about showing overwhelming generosity, extravagant grace, the desire and willingness to bless others in a self-forgetful manner. Maybe it means acting in a way where we even get God and others giggle a bit—just because our actions are so unexpected and out-of-the ordinary.

As I struggle in my own life, and help others to do the same, I pray to experience and engender this kind of cheerful giving...this kind of hilarious joy...that arises out of heart liberated to love God above all else. Imagine if hilarious joy and extravagant generosity began to characterize the Religious Society of Friends. Can you imagine it?!? I think it is both a wonderful...and terrifying possibility to consider. I suspect it would feel a lot like being turned inside-out and upside down for most of us. May each of you be twisted and pulled in this fashion and may foster this same kind of joy and transformation in others through your work and witness.