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Lead On, Spirit: Contemplating the Future
Mark 10:46-52

Sermons on ghosts—a ghost of the past, a ghost of the present, and a ghost of the future—may seem to have more to do with Halloween than Christmas. Actually, today’s sermon and the past two Sunday sermons have little to do with Christmas or Halloween and everything to do with stewardship. Stewardship is, after all, the practice of using your resources wisely—all of them: your money, your time, your energy, your faith, your friends, your relationships, and your health.

Klontz and Kahler utilize the classic Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* to teach financial wisdom and healthy stewardship.¹ To a man of financial means who is the epitome of unhappiness, the Ghost of Christmas Past visits Scrooge and enabled him to remember events in his childhood, youth, and young adulthood that engrained unhealthy attitudes and life-defeating patterns. The visit to the past reawakened his senses and cleared a path for him to take in new information.

The Ghost of Christmas Present enabled Scrooge to experience reality. It’s what we don’t know that can hurt us. And, it is what we do with what we learn in the present that can open a new door to the future.

As the scene of the Ghost of Christmas Present comes to a close, we hear Scrooge pressing, “Lead on! Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me. Lead on, Spirit.”

In 1888, a man by the name of Alfred picked up the morning newspaper and was shocked to see his own name in the headlines. Alfred was a famous inventor, and the newspapers had mistakenly published the story of his death, when in fact his brother Ludwig had been the one to die the day before.

Much to Alfred’s chagrin, his most famous invention, which he had originally developed to aid excavation, had been converted to use as a horrific

¹ Ted Klontz, Rick Kahler, and Brad Klontz, *The Financial Wisdom of Ebenezer Scrooge* (Deerfield Beach, Florida, Health Communications, Inc.: 2006).

weapon of war. Even when his invention was originally contemplated for use as a weapon, he reasoned that the weapon's potential for causing massive death and destruction was so obvious that it would never be used for such a purpose. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

On that morning in 1888, French headlines screamed, "The Merchant of Death is Dead!" That was how the world would view his entire life! That would be his eternal legacy. Shaken, Alfred clearly saw the consequences of his actions. He resolved to change how he would be remembered.

In his will, Alfred left his enormous wealth to fund "prizes to those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind." The prizes to be awarded were in the fields of chemistry, physics, medicine, literature, and, ironically, peace. Alfred, like Scrooge, had seen the consequences of his actions and made a conscious decision to do everything possible to change his legacy.

Today, Alfred Nobel, once seen as the Merchant of Death, is remembered not as much for his invention of dynamite, which is but a footnote in history, but rather for his creation of the yearly prizes, the most famous of which is the Nobel Peace Prize.

Feminist author Susan Griffin once said: "There is always time to make right what is wrong." An old Turkish Proverb offers its challenge: "No matter how far you have gone on the wrong road, turn back."

For the past four Sundays, the Old Testament readings have been from the Wisdom Book of Job. We saw Job holding on to his integrity in the first two chapters, struggling with his past as his three friends accused him of wrongdoing to warrant these disasters in his life, and last week railing out against God in his present condition, demanding an explanation. Today's unread passage, the last chapter (chapter 42) has Job acting on his new knowledge and understanding of God and life, bringing the book to a new, happy ending.

Likewise, the Gospel reading for today (Mark 10:2-16) is about blind Bartimaeus. When Bartimaeus learns that the shouts of excitement coming from down the Jericho Road were connected with Jesus of Nazareth, he begins shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me...Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and asked, "What do you want me to do for

you?” Bartimaeus said, “I want to see again.” And, he did. Having information that can radically change your future and doing nothing with it is the response of a fool.

If your life were suddenly to end tomorrow, what things would you regret or feel badly about not having done? What unfinished business is there with your most important relationships—things you wish you had said to loved ones, things you feel about your loved ones that you hope they know, places you wish you had visited, adventures you wish you had undertaken, things you wish you had learned? From such thoughts you may get some very significant clues as to what things are important for you to accomplish in order for you to live your life with greater passion, meaning, and integrity...as did Scrooge.

Henry David Thoreau reminds us that “...things do not change, we do.” Too often, people congratulate themselves upon seeing the error of their ways. They have good intentions to change...but not now—later. Such people spend years rationalizing their unhealthy behavior and never change.

“Action is the antidote to despair,” said Joan Baez.

As Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* comes to a close, Scrooge acts to change his old patterns of behavior.

- He sends a turkey to the Cratchit family for their Christmas dinner. His money script that we’ve talked about in the past weeks has been modified: “It’s okay to spend money on others.”
- He goes out in his best clothes and walks the streets greeting everyone he sees with a smile. His new money script is: “Happiness is not about having money.”
- Scrooge meets the churchwardens who on the previous day had asked for a donation to charity. He had turned them down. With his new money script, he made a generous contribution: “Giving to the poor does not necessarily encourage laziness.”
- Scrooge stops in on his nephew, Fred, for Christmas dinner, living under another modified money script: “Some people want you for yourself, and not because you have money.”
- He completely changes his attitude toward the Cratchit family and becomes a second father to Tiny Tim with a new money script:

“Relationships can give life meaning and are worth the investment of my time and money.”²

Getting in touch with our past, learning from our present, and acting to bring about changes in our future can open up a whole new world. Walt Whitman said, “Henceforth, I ask not for good fortune, I myself am good fortune.” Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth...be salt. You are the light of the world...let your light so shine.” Maybe we just need to open ourselves to the wonderful world that is locked up inside us and begin to live, really live. AMEN.

Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

² Ibid. 116-117.