



January 29, 2023

**The Power of Money**  
Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation

**Reflection on Generosity - Barry Zickuhr**

Good Morning.

I'm Barry Zickuhr, Chair of your Capital Campaign Committee.

I'm here to talk to you about a topic I don't enjoy – Money. Yes, I get the irony.

I'm reminded of one of my favorite actors, Alan Rickman, best known as Severus Snape and Hons Gruber.

But I like him as Ed, the starving New York artist. When asked do you want a job, for money. You remember money?

“Yes, I remember money. It irritates me that I need money. I shouldn't need it.”

It WOULD be great if we didn't need money, but we do.

One thing I love about OUUC is that we give.

Money, our time, of ourselves. We are one of the most giving congregations I know.

We're the Blue Apron Brigade giving food to the homeless.

We're the sea of yellow t-shirts at the Capitol, giving our voices to causes like Gender Equality, Climate Justice, and Racial Inequity.

We GIVE of ourselves. But sometimes we forget to give TO ourselves.

I look around this sanctuary – our home, the place we come every week to rest and rejuvenate.

To contemplate and connect. This home we use as the springboard to launch our voices and our efforts just a bit further.

The solid rock we hold onto as we reach into the chaos of life and pull someone to safety.

And our home needs our help.

We have this term at my house – Life Maintenance.

That stuff you do to keep things going, so you can focus on your passions. Not fun, not enjoyable, but necessary.

Oiling the squeaky hinge, changing the light bulbs, replacing the dishwasher – necessary. But boring.

OUUC is in need of a little life maintenance right now.

“I irritates me that I need money, I shouldn’t need it”

To which Kevin Kline replies “I disagree. Sometimes it’s good to get involved in other people’s problems”

With money?

With money.

### **The Power of Money: Part 1     Rev. Mary Gear**

Thank you, Barry, for sharing your reflection and for your leadership and work on the Capital Campaign.

There is much wisdom about the power of money, our topic today. I like the idea that goes back to the 1600’s and which has been said by leaders from Francis Bacon to Thornton Wilder. Here’s what Bacon said:

Riches were like muck (or manure): When it lay upon a heap, it gave but a stench, and ill odor; but when it was spread upon the ground, then it was cause of much fruit.

Some of us may think that all riches are like manure, dirty and smelly, to be avoided. Yet we can do so much to nurture the world we dream about if we pool our resources and spread them around. Money is a complicated thing, and we tend to have complicated feelings about it. It’s a hard topic and one some of us see as a necessary evil.

I’m going to talk about money today. Before I do, I invite you into a short time of reflection so we can get grounded. Please get comfortable in whatever way that is for you.

Turn your attention inward for just a moment. Take a breath and remember to breathe.

Notice what is going through your mind right now. What are your thoughts? Are you thinking about what we just heard from Barry? Are you thinking about yesterday or tomorrow? Just notice your thoughts and name one to yourself.

Next, notice what you are feeling. What is your emotional state? Stressed, calm, anxious, wary, worried? Notice your emotions and name one to yourself.

Last, notice your body. Start with your head and scan your body down to your toes. Where are you tense, relaxed? What is your body telling you? Just notice and name to yourself what you feel in your body.

Take a breath, in and out. And when you are ready, bring your attention back to our gathering here, now.

In our culture, we are bombarded with messages about money, which are primarily about scarcity or “not enough.” Do we make enough money, have enough money, spend enough money? These messages can evoke fear. We’re given messages about class, our social and economic status. Perhaps it’s criticism or stereotypes about the class we are in, or that we need to work harder to move up or circle our wagons to maintain the class we’ve achieved. This can evoke anxiety and shame.

Money is a leading cause of tension and conflict in relationships and in families. One of the top three reasons that people leave a church is “too much talk about money.”

We also have a long history of religious teaching about money, going back to our most ancient stories from the Bible. One scholar suggests that there are 2300 bible verses mentioning money. There are many proverbs about money, and in the book of Romans, there is guidance to give everyone what you owe them, including paying your taxes. Thirteen of Jesus 39 parables are about money. And then there’s the story of Jesus in the temple turning over the tables of the money lenders, a story that has been interpreted to say that money is evil and unclean.

What have you been taught about money, either by life experience or by people?

I grew up in a working-class family and watched my parents get a college education as my brothers and I attended school. We had enough, we always had food and shelter, and a big extended family as a safety net. My grandparents and parents worked hard to get into and stay in the middle class. I was taught to work hard and save money; I was taught to acquire and accumulate because there was always the unspoken fear that there wouldn’t be enough.

When my husband, John, and I met we took a class together about money and how to manage it, which was a good foundation for our life together. That shared understanding has served us well. We also took a course called “Your Money or Your Life” which helped us focus on our relationship with money and how to fill our spiritual needs in meaningful ways. And I still struggle with issues of scarcity and fear—we swim in it in our culture, and sometimes the fear is all too present.

I wasn’t taught how to recognize enough; most likely none of us were. How much is enough? It is what is sufficient to meet our basic needs. And I define basic needs as shelter, clothing, food, water, medical care, education, safety and access to transportation. Some of us don’t have enough to meet our basic needs; others have enough sometimes and not others. Some of us have an abundance, more than enough.

Fundraiser Lynn Twist says: “the power of our relationship with money is when we discover this exquisite distinction of enough.” The exquisite distinction of enough. In this case, exquisite means delicate and fragile, as well as beautiful. Knowing “enough” requires tuning out the voices that say there’s not enough even when our basic needs are met. It requires introspection, paying attention, and listening. In a culture of more, more, more, it is countercultural to suggest that there is enough. And, countercultural is hard work--ask any activist.

In this congregation and in our Unitarian Universalist faith, we talk about hard things. We teach our children about intimacy and sex with the Our Whole Lives curriculum. In last Sunday’s service, Rev. Sara led us in a ritual and offered a reflection on reproductive justice. This week we’re talking about money. And it’s not just in this service. Rev. Sara created and we are offering a class for our young ones called “Kids Making \$ense,” that’s s-e-n-s-e and the s in sense is a dollar sign. This class is for elementary aged kids to help them better understand three things: money--what it is, why we invented it, and how to manage it; generosity, and stewardship/ of the earth, the common good, and each other.

Here, we talk about money because it is a spiritual topic and generosity is a spiritual practice. At its best, a faith community helps us with the big questions of life: Who am I? What are my values? How do I want to be in the world? How does my life reflect my values? And money is part of the answer to each of those questions; not the whole answer, but part of it.

Author Annie Dillard said that how we spend our days is how we spend our lives. It is said that you can tell someone's real values by noticing how they spend their money. How we spend our money is how we live our values.

## **Reading**

An excerpt from a speech given by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King titled "The False God of Money" given in Atlanta, GA on July 19, 1953.

Doubtless someone has been saying, but are you minimizing the importance of money? Are you saying that we must not pursue economic goals? To which I would answer, of course not. No one can really minimize the importance of money. Even if he minimizes money in theory, he cannot do it in fact, for it is necessary for survival itself. Without it men are deprived not only of luxuries, but also of necessities. So it would be sheer nonsense to attempt to minimize the importance of money.

It is not the possession of money that I am condemning, rather it is the inordinate worship of it that I am condemning. Money in its proper place is a worthwhile and necessary instrument for a well-rounded life, but when it is projected to the status of a god it becomes a power that corrupts and an instrument of exploitation.

## **The Power of Money: Part 2     Rev. Mary Gear**

We know The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr to have been a prophetic voice for justice and a man dedicated to racial and economic justice. What isn't talked about as much is that King was a dedicated and amazing fundraiser. He took his inspiration from Gandhi, who was also an excellent fundraiser. King and Gandhi understood the power of money used and not used; both used boycotts as part of their work for justice. Mother Teresa was a committed, tireless and wonderful fundraiser. These were deeply spiritual people who knew the power of money and what money could do when used for the common good.

I appreciate the distinction that King makes about money and power. He said that money is necessary for survival, so of course it is important. Anyone who has not had enough for food, shelter, medical care, and other basic needs, knows that money is important. We know that money doesn't buy happiness. It does buy necessities, comfort, and options.

It's when money becomes the false idol, when more becomes the goal without any recognition of enough, then money becomes evil. You may have heard the saying that money is the root of all evil. That saying is from the first book of Timothy in the Christian Bible and what it says is this:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Money itself isn't evil. It's the love of money above all else that leads us to act in ways that go against our basic humanity and against what we say are our values. There is a reason that greed is a cardinal sin, one of the seven deadly sins. Greed is the sin of aggression, grasping, and can be predatory. Greed causes us to lose touch with our interconnection and our innate care for each other.

King's work for racial justice always included economic justice as well. His radical idea was that we had the means to eliminate poverty; as a society, we had enough, we have enough. He proposed full employment for those who could and wanted to work, with adequate wages, a decent living standard for those who couldn't or shouldn't work, elimination of slums with adequate housing for all, medical care and education for all, and care for our earth so we would have clean water and air. We have enough resources to make this happen-this is the work of justice.

In the past couple of decades, there has been more conversation about reparations, another powerful use of money. Reparations is making monetary repair for past abuses of power, it's making amends for a wrong that has been done. We know that this country was colonized on land occupied by indigenous peoples who were never compensated for their stolen lands. We also know that this country was built on the labor of Africans and African Americans who were enslaved. Indigenous and African American people today live a legacy of exploitation and never enough.

What would it look like to empower them economically, to make reparations? As Dio Lewis said in their reflection, the goal is to lift everyone up together and some need to be lifted more because they start lower. That is the work of economic justice, and that work requires that we talk about the distribution of money. When we refuse to talk about money, we give up our power.

This past month, we've been exploring the spiritual theme of power. I notice that interwoven with that, we keep coming back to the idea of choice. Power is about choice; those with power have choices that those without power are denied. As a people of faith, we are called to use our power for justice, economic justice, reproductive justice, climate justice. Choice for all, enough for all.

The Capital Campaign Committee has worked hard to help us understand the needs of our building, our spiritual home. The Stewardship Team is hard at work preparing to help us understand how we work together to build the world we dream about.

Understanding is one thing; it's how we engage our brains. What we do with our money is much more determined by how we feel. Are we afraid there's not enough now? Are we worried there won't be enough in the future? Are we ashamed of what we have? Or of what we don't have?

This is what I hope for myself, for you, and for us as a community: that we can create and maintain a relationship with money that is spiritually satisfying. What I think that means is knowing the power of money as a tool for justice and the common good. It's feeling "the exquisite distinction of enough" and the justice of enough for everyone. It is knowing our deepest held values and that we can use our money to reflect our values. And it is doing the work of building meaningful connections with each other, with our values, our resources and our power, and being willing to use them.

As we do so, may we find the courage to confront the scarcity mindset in ourselves and in our community. May we seek to know the exquisite distinction of enough. And may we always open our hearts to the power of love.

