

Luke 10:25-37

## **What is Mine is Yours**

### **Rev. Rey Mondragón**

Robbery is an act that has been around for a long time. The reasons people rob other people may differ from person to person, from entity to entity, from business to business, or from corporation to corporation, but the purpose is the same. The goal of those who rob others is ‘to obtain in part, or completely the possessions of the victim.’

Robbers are subject to a penalty because it violates human rights and because it breaks the divine law. The book of Exodus contains some laws pertaining to robbery. For example, 22:7 says that whenever someone would steal money, if apprehended, the thief would have to pay double the amount stolen. Robbery affects a lot of people. The victim, his/her family, the robber’s life, his/her family, and friends. The United Methodist Communications posted some statements saying: “crime has affected his family. Wilson's son is serving a life sentence for his role in a **robbery**.” “19-year-old Joaquin Dorrance, has been serving a sentence for **robbery** since October 2002.”

I have seen some video clips about people either attempting robbery or completing the act of robbery. In most cases the aggressor(s) demanded the money: in cash, or asked for lottery tickets which could later be converted into cash. In most cases the robbers were apprehended.

Money, cash, the currency, and the assets of a nation are crucial for a country because they hold a value that helps maintain stability and add to its wealth. Be aware that Uncle Sam wants our money, and will find ways to get it. Money is everywhere we look, and has been around for a long time, too. In different forms across the centuries, money has gained its place among humanity.

How come we have to talk about money at church? What brings God into the picture? Is God interested in what we have—in our money? The answer is ‘yes.’ God is not going to attack us for money. Is it possible that we may be robbing God? Probably, if we believe what I used to believe ten years ago.

I believed that the church was wealthy, I was poor, and the church did not need my money. It is probably true that the church is not poor, but that was not the point. I was confronted with divine Word during the study of Discipleship, module I, where in one of the sessions we spoke about giving to the church. Malachi 3:8-10 spoke, “Will humans rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the LORD, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you overflowing blessings.” I began giving ten percent of my paycheck after that.

Most of us received a letter encouraging us to pledge and to share of what we have with Ypsilanti First United Methodist. The purpose includes self-support of the local

congregation, implementation of our programs, activities, and missionary presence. At the national and global levels, we also contribute through the larger United Methodist denomination to colleges and universities, hospitals, and missions.

The fact that I received an education is an example of the commitment many of us have made to share of what we have with others. I went to Adrian College, where I always applied for and received scholarships, which was in part, money given by you. I also received financial aid at Duke Divinity School, where I went to seminary. I am now serving as a minister because many Christians have committed to giving and sharing of what we have.

Most of us are confronted with the principle of sharing at a very early age. I grew up very poor in a rural area in Mexico. Sometimes, among brothers and sisters there were arguments over apples, bananas, cookies, or soft drinks in terms of how many bananas others were going to eat or how much soda one was going to drink. We did not have a refrigerator at home, but some people in town did, and they would sell Coca cola or Pepsi drinks in 12 ounce-glass bottles. I remember, sometimes my father would send my younger sister or me to the local store to buy either Coca-cola or Pepsi products. We would buy three bottles and make six drinks by pouring into three glasses the fair amount of half. Wanting more, I always added water to my drink to increase the amount. Now I realize that it helped me to stay healthy. At the moment, we did not want to share, but the circumstances helped us understand the importance of sharing because that way we helped each other. It was a good thing to learn.

Later on, at the age of 19, I decided to migrate to the United States to generate more income to help my younger sister who wanted to go to college. Our parents could not help to buy school materials, pay for transportation, for rent, and for tuition. About three months after I got to Wisconsin, I began sending between two hundred and three hundred dollars a month to my sister Cecilia, who was in college. Whatever I contributed was very helpful, she graduated, and now she has been teaching elementary school for the past six years.

Sharing makes a lot of people happy, those who receive the benefit of our sharing and even those of us who share of what we have.

Believe it or not there is joy in giving. It is more rewarding to give than to receive. This expression attributed to the New Testament is now proving to have an effect in our brains. "You give from the heart and... it satisfies your brain," says Jordan Grafman, chief of Cognitive Neuroscience at The National Institutes of Health. Grafman and his team decided to study which areas of the human brain are involved in donating to organizations "because we know that other species just don't do," he says. They used a technique called functional MRI. It reveals which brain structures are most active relative to the rest of the brain when people perform certain mental tasks. They asked 19 healthy volunteers to play a computer game while having their brains scanned. In addition to giving cash rewards, the game also asked for donations to charities. "When they donated,

either they could donate and it would not cost them personally or they could donate and it might cost them some money," explains Grafman.

The researchers were not surprised that when people received money in the game, it lit up structures deep in the brain associated with the release of the chemical dopamine, which triggers feelings of pleasure and reward. (This chemical is also associated with our motivation to seek food, drugs or love.) Their reports concluded that donating to charities lit up the brain's reward circuits even more than receiving cash. "The same regions of the brain that are associated with the reward and the good feeling you have when you get something yourself, like money, were the same areas that were activated when you give. That surprised us," says Grafman. "And not only were the same areas involved, but in fact they were more activated when you give than when you receive." Giving also excited areas of the brain that are not activated by receiving. One produces the so-called "cuddle hormone" oxytocin. "It's very well known that oxytocin is released when people feel an attachment," Grafman says. "It definitely seems like you're going to get more pleasure, if these brain activations can be of any guide, when you're giving than when you're simply receiving."

So clearly, donating is a much more learned behavior than simply taking or receiving from others ... in some sense, we have to experience donation, we have to be persuaded to donate in the beginning. But once we do donate we will come back and give more because we will realize what a pleasurable sensation it was to donate.

This study is also consistent with the actions of the Good Samaritan found in the gospel according to Luke, where the Samaritan paid two denarii (two-day wage) and was willing to come back and reimburse additional expenses for the care of the injured. The story describes an act of robbery going very bad. What appeared to be really bad news also contained space to see good news. The story was triggered by one of the interpreter of the Old Testament Law who wanted to test Jesus. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer from Jesus was: Share of what you have with those who can use it and find joy in giving.

Preaching professor Luccock, at Yale University interpreted that this parable reveals some philosophies of life:

- 1) One philosophy is represented by the **robbers** who attacked the person going from Jerusalem to Jerico. They stripped off his clothes and beat him. Then they went away, leaving him almost dead. Their philosophy was, "**What is yours is mine and I am going to get it.**" It is not a preferred philosophy.
- 2) Another philosophy comes through the **priest** and the **Levite**. Both members of the people who had been assigned to minister in the religious life of the Jewish community. They were going back home after their prayers in which they often said, "Thank you God because you did not make me a woman, neither a Samaritan, nor a gentile. Their philosophy was, "**What is mine is mine, and I am going to keep it.**"
- 3) Other philosophy is revealed by the **Samaritan**, who belonged to a group of people considered religiously unclean because they were descendants of the

mixed marriages that followed from the Assyrian settlement after the fallen northern kingdom. Samaritans were not considered of pure Jewish race. Nevertheless, the Samaritan reflects the preferred philosophy saying, “**What is mine is yours and I am going to share it.**”