Reflection Guide for Worship Series
Enid First United Methodist Church
September 22nd – October 6th, 2019

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
John 10:10b

Quote from It’s a Wonderful Life:
God: “There’s a man down on earth that needs our help.”
Clarence, the Angel: “Is he sick?”
God: “No, worse, he’s discouraged.”

Questions for Reflection:
- What are a few of your earliest memories related to money? Why do you think they stand out?
- What were the messages about success and accomplishment you received growing up? Did they have to do with money? How would you describe your family’s “culture” around money?
- Which parent or caregiver are you most like when it comes to money? List some of the characteristics you have with this parent around money.

Characters in “It’s a Wonderful Life”
The Innocent (Uncle Billy). The Innocent’s approach to money is like the ostrich with its head in the sand. They may be happy-go-lucky on the outside but are a little fearful and anxious on the inside. Their basic thought is, “I don’t want to deal with this, and I wish it would go away.” Or, “Somebody I love and trust should take care of this for me.” They want others to help them so they will feel “safe,” but there’s often an underlying fear that whoever is helping them will abandon them. Uncle Billy in It’s a Wonderful Life has Innocent energies. He’s happy and funny on the surface, but inside he’s fearful and anxious. He’s dependent on others for his job, even though he’s fairly unskilled and scatterbrained—always tying a string around his finger to remember something he’s forgotten. For Uncle Billy, the Innocent, when problems arise, he’s nonconfrontational but worried, turning to alcohol to make his problems go away.
The Victim (Pottersville’s Ma Bailey). Victim energy assures us that our problems are not our fault—they’re someone else’s. Sometimes we really are dealing with financial and other types of difficulties outside of our control, but often we have a part in it we don’t want to admit. We’d rather find someone or something to blame. Ma Bailey in It’s a Wonderful Life—that is, Ma from the dystopian reality of Pottersville—is suspicious, distrustful, and bitter. When George comes to her house looking for help and mentions her brother, Uncle Billy, she turns him away, suspecting he’s trying to take advantage of her. George isn’t her problem and she’s used to people abusing her. She’s a Victim.

The Warrior (Sam Wainwright). Warrior energy is focused, decisive, and gets things done. The caveat is that people with strong Warrior energy can get into the “sport” of it and forget it’s related to anything meaningful in their lives. Dealing with money becomes the thing itself. Sam Wainwright captures this in It’s a Wonderful Life. Sam is the friend of Mary and George who gets in on the ground floor of the plastics industry in the 1920s, becoming wealthy and successful. He is portrayed as someone who inherited the opportunity, but who also understands the business world and is blithely unconflicted about making tons of money. He is somewhat goofy and materialistic, but also seems full of a certain joie de vivre.

The Martyr (George Bailey Jr.). We all know people with a high dose of the Martyr: resentful, self-sacrificing, long-suffering. On the outside they may be smiling, but inside they’re resentful. They are often perfectionists, expecting a lot from themselves and others and living with disappointment. There is certainly nothing wrong with caring for others, or giving of our time, energy, and money. The problem comes when the energy is used to rescue others while taking away their opportunity to help themselves, or when the giving comes at the expense of the giver. It’s a Wonderful Life protagonist George Bailey Jr. suffers from some serious Martyr leanings. He stays home to help his father take care of the building and loan and gives his college money to his brother. He dreams of traveling, but when his father dies, he stays home to keep the business going. He even gives up his honeymoon to save the building and loan. Meanwhile, he grows darker and more resentful as the years roll on. (That is until the end of the movie!)

The Tyrant (Mr. Potter). People with Tyrant energy use money to control people, events, and circumstances. At its core, this energy springs from deep-rooted fears and can spread easily into anger, almost like an addiction. This energy might have started in a healthy way—perhaps as a kind of Warrior energy—but it has grown wild into a tool for power. Tyrant energy can be found in people with a little or a lot of money. If money is used to control others, and that control is based in fear and anger, the Tyrant is showing its colors. It’s not hard to see who the Tyrant is in It’s a Wonderful Life. As a somewhat one-dimensional character, Mr. Potter fits the model perfectly in his black suit and heavy wooden wheelchair pushed around by his flunky. He has a lot of money and uses it to get more. With no family, he seems to care about nothing but control over all the businesses in Bedford Falls.

The Fool (Clarence Odbody). Everyone loves the Fool. People with Fool energy are fun and spontaneous. Unlike the Innocent, who may seem optimistic on the outside but inside is anxious, the Fool is genuinely optimistic, inside and out. They also tend to be very generous. The problem with this “live for today” attitude is that it’s not always grounded in reality. People with a lot of this energy are not quite telling themselves the whole story. They don’t want to look at things realistically or bother to do the math because they might miss out on something. No, that would be a downer. In It’s a Wonderful Life, Clarence Odbody, George Bailey’s guardian angel, has a bit of the Fool in him. He exists quite literally outside of the money system, so he’s the perfect image of this energy. When he’s told he’ll be returning to earth to help George, he has no clue how difficult it’s going to be to convince him that he shouldn’t throw away his life. In Nick’s bar, Clarence seems oblivious to the harsh reality around him (and to the fact that he has no money).
The Creator/Artist (Mary Hatch Bailey). The energy of the Creator/Artist is one of spirit and creativity. People with a strong level of this energy tend to be internally motivated and non-materialistic. The problem is that they like the freedom that money brings, but don’t want to be “sullied” by the material world. They may feel that because they are spiritual beings, they should not have to deal with money. The issue is not the amount of money they have, but the fear that they’re not being true to themselves and the belief that money is somehow tainting them. The one character in It’s a Wonderful Life who most approximates this energy is George’s wife, Mary, though it’s not a perfect fit. Like the Creator/Artist, she is not at all materialistic. At the beginning of the movie, she eschews the advances of Sam Wainwright, the wealthy inheritor and entrepreneur, in favor of her real love for George. She doesn’t mind living in a drafty, leaky house, as long as she can pursue her joys: raising her family and helping others. We don’t know from the movie whether Mary is disdainful of money and the material world or whether she worries about “selling out”—common characteristics of the Creator/Artist.

Questions for Reflection:

- What aspects of yourself do you see in each of these Characters?
- If you had to say what is “enough” wealth, what would you say? What do you believe would happen if you didn’t have “enough”?
- Do you feel that your use of money aligns with God’s calling upon your life?
- What are your spiritual practices? Are there new ones you would like to explore for the future?

Quotes from It’s a Wonderful Life:

“You've been given a great gift, George: a chance to see what the world would be like without you. ... Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives, and when he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”
— The angel Clarence Odbody

“Mr. Potter, what makes you such a hard-skulled character? You have no family, no children. You can't begin to spend all the money you've got.”
— Peter Bailey to Mr. Potter

“J ust remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you’re talking about ... they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn’t think so. People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they’re cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you’ll ever be.”
— George Bailey Jr. to Mr. Potter

“A toast ... to my big brother George. The richest man in town!”
— Harry Bailey

“You see, George, you really had a wonderful life.”
— Clarence Odbody
How do we get there?

The answer is the practice. When our practices, no matter how incremental or seemingly simple, are serving the vision, we live with a sense of wholeheartedness and wonder that blesses us, those around us, and the world. And at the heart of these practices is living and giving with gratitude. How can we align our money practices (earning, spending, giving, and storing) with being the persons that God has created us to be? How can we create ongoing practices that continue to strengthen us in our relationship with God through how we handle money?

God owns everything, and we get to manage it for Him. The responsible management of these God-given resources is called stewardship.

The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord. – Psalm 24:1

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest. – Proverbs 3:9

Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God. – 1 Peter 4:10

Remember this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. – 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. – Matthew 6:20

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. - 1 Corinthians 4:2

We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give. — Winston Churchill

The world asks, “What does a man own?” Christ asks, “How does he use it?” – Andrew Murray

“I have held many things in my hand, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands that I still possess.” – Martin Luther