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## The Stewardship Sermon

2 Corinthians 6:1-10  
Matthew 21:23-32

“Behold, now is the acceptable time;  
behold, now is the day of salvation.”  
2 Corinthians 6:2b

The two most dangerous words ever spoken.

Dangerous to Christianity.

Two words which can destroy the church of Jesus Christ.

Two words which threaten the very existence of the State College Presbyterian Church.

What are those two dangerous words?

I'm not going to tell you – at least not for a while.

First I have to give my annual Stewardship Sermon.

(pause)

Yes, that's what I thought too.

The Stewardship Sermon, **yes**, it is that time of year again, **but** almost every Sunday since the beginning of the year you have heard a Minute for Mission.

You have been asked to support the church as we carry out the mission of Jesus Christ here and throughout the world.

**Yes** it is time for the Stewardship Sermon. **But** every week this fall you have seen in the bulletin how poor our giving is this year. How far we are falling behind where we need to be to do our work.

You have seen that every week.

**Yes** it is time for the Stewardship Sermon. **But** you have received a mailing with the goal budget for next year. It spells out in great detail the very modest increases we need to do the work Christ is calling us to do in this church.

You have seen our goals and our needs.

**Yes** it is time for the Stewardship Sermon. **But** you have received (or will shortly) a letter from me (my seventeenth Pastor's Stewardship letter, as a matter of fact) – a letter sharing my anxieties about the year ahead. My bewilderment that just as we are hearing the economy is heading up, our giving has headed down.

You have heard what keeps me awake nights worrying.

**Yes**, it is by obvious by now that you know an increase in giving is needed to provide for the ministry, mission, and worship of God in this church in 2010.

Obvious.

So tell me, on this Lord's Day, **why** do you need me to preach a Stewardship sermon?

In fact, it would be insulting of me to preach a Stewardship Sermon.

Insulting to you, because it would imply that you are children who have to be nagged into action.

Insulting to me, that my role among you is once a year to serve as goad.

(pause)

Hmm, whoa, time out! Do you see what I just did?

I just used the **two most dangerous words in the world** to talk myself out of giving a Stewardship sermon this morning!

The two most dangerous words in the world: “**Yes, but. . .**”

And they are **most** dangerous when we say them to **ourselves!**

Which brings us back to the story which Deannine/Diana read from Matthew’s gospel. (Matthew 21:28-30)

*“What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not;’ but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.”*

The need is clear.

It is the time to do God’s work.

Will you go into the vineyard?

The first son said **no**. Then went to work anyway.

The second son said **yes**. Then somehow talked himself out of working.

I suspect he said to himself the two most dangerous words in the world.

The words “Yes, but.”

“Yes, I will surely go.”

“Yes, I will, but he asks at the most convenient time.”

“Yes, I want to work in the vineyard, but tomorrow would work better for me.”

“Yes, he is my father, but sometime he treats me like the hired help.”

“Yes, I know I should do what he wants, but I have more important things to do.”

“Yes, I will work, but it can wait until tomorrow.”

I know this son inside out. I know him from the top of his head down to his toes.

For I am a master at talking myself out of things I would rather not do. I am an expert at procrastination.

I have spent a lifetime perfecting “Yes, but.”

You see, “Yes, but. . .” is different from saying “no.”

That’s what makes it so **dangerous**.

Have you ever been engaged in a conversation like this:

Mrs. A. "My husband always insists on doing our own repairs, and he never builds anything right.

Mrs. B. Why doesn't he take a course in carpentry?

Mrs. A. Yes, but he doesn't have time.

Mrs. B. Why don't you buy him some good tools?

Mrs. A. Yes, but he doesn't know how to use them.

Mrs. B. Why don't you have your repairs done by a contractor?

Mrs. A. Yes, but that would cost too much.

Yes it **sounds** like an adult exchange, but it is really the “Yes, but” game.

What has happened is that Mrs. A. plays the child who seems to be looking to solve a problem, and Mrs. B. quickly falls into the role of the parent with suggested solutions to the problem.

It looks like they are searching for an answer.

But the real game is to reduce the parent to silence.

The exchange continues until Mrs. B., who has been offering all the suggestions, **is** reduced to silence.

The minute Mrs. B can think of no more solutions, Mrs. A wins.

She is off the hook.

Silence means her problem is insoluble.

The whole thing then ends with some comment like, “That’s men for you – impossible!”

Now that we understand the game, we can understand a little more how the Second Son would say, “Yes sir. I will go and do it.” And then not.

The Second Son’s “Yes, but. . .” is dangerously present in the church today.

One such exchange would be:

We should give more to the church.

Why don’t you budget a set amount for the church and turn in a pledge card?

Yes, we could do that, but you never know about emergencies.

Why not set it aside for three months in your home, but don’t give it to the church until you see whether you can live without it?

Yes, we could do that, but we would probably spend it.

Why don’t you give it to someone to keep for you?

Yes, that’s a good idea, but we just bought a new car.

Silence will come after a while.

Again a solution is not really being looked for.

It is to reduce the other to silence.

The silence says, “You see, pledging is impractical.”

It will end up with some comment like; “It’s so hard to make ends meet these days.”

Whoa!!

How did that example get in there?

This isn’t a stewardship sermon.

As the judge would say to a jury – dismiss that example from your minds.

You **have** heard enough to be able to fill in any of the other “Yes, but’s.”

I should go to church more often.

Why don’t you? Yes, but.

I should study the Bible more.

Why don’t you? Yes, but.

I should do more for the poor.

Why don’t you? Yes, but.

This dangerous game can go on forever. And it threatens the very life of the church.

It may seem that this game is far removed from the Bible, but people played the “Yes, but. . .” game with Jesus all the time!

Remember a few of the “Yes, but’s” Jesus faced?

Jesus said: "Love your neighbor as yourself.

They replied: “**Yes, but** who is my neighbor?”

Jesus said: “You have heard, but I tell you. . . .”

They replied: “**Yes, but** are you the promised messiah?”

Jesus said: “I have performed signs and wonders—the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear.”

They replied: “**Yes, but** does your power come from God or the Evil One?”

“Yes, but” is **so dangerous** it would reduce even the voice of Jesus to silence!

So destructive that the church will eventually be reduced to silence if we keep playing this game of “Yes, but.”

This game of knowing exactly what we need to do, but convincing ourselves it can wait!

- There is no question that Jesus said "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Turn around. Rejoice. You are part of it."
- There is no question that all of us have seen at least in part what this means for our lives and for the lives of others.
- There is no question about what we need do in ministry and mission, and in giving so ministry and mission can happen here.

The question **is**: when do we start? Are we going to stall until everything dries up?

What time in our lives is acceptable to do what is so obvious?

Do we pray like St. Augustine: "Lord make me your obedient servant, **but not just yet.**"

- Not yet during football season.
- Not yet during a recession.
- Not yet until the stock market recovers.

- Not yet while my kids are young.
- Not yet while I am trying to enjoy retirement.

“Lord, make me your obedient servant, but not just yet.”

St. Paul tried to answer the same question from his congregations.

**When?**

"Behold, **now** is the acceptable time;  
behold **now** is the day of salvation." (II. Cor. 6:2)

**Now** is the time to put aside the game of “Yes, but. . .” and do the work Christ calls us to do.

So I guess this turned into a Stewardship Sermon after all.

You know the need.

You know the challenge.

Let’s not be the second son. Let’s drop the game of “Yes, but. . .” with all its reasons why we can’t do what God needs us to do.

On the other hand – go ahead and **be** the first son if you must!

Go ahead and say: “no!”

Moan and groan to your heart’s content. I will be glad to listen and sympathize – as long as when you are done you do what the first son did – go do the work that needs to be done.

But rather than do what **either** the first son **or** second son did, I am really asking you to do what the **daughter** did.

Oh, you didn’t know there was a daughter?

Well, true, Jesus never mentions her.

But I am **sure** there was a daughter.

And I know what **she** did.

When her father said “Daughter, go and work in the vineyard today.”

She said neither yes nor no.

She did not **say** a thing.

She just went to work and did what needed to be done.

May we do the same.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.