

Sermon by Ted Mosebach
First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
East Hartford, Connecticut

November 15, 2009

The Harvest of Righteousness
(Seventh in Series, *The Treasures of the Church*)

Ministry Group Recognized: Retreaters

Many of us may have an understanding of the importance of making investments. We put our money in the bank in hopes of gaining interest, however small the interest rate is right now. If we have resources for a longer term strategy, perhaps preparing for retirement, we may purchase stocks or bonds and hold them for years, maybe even for a lifetime, so that they yield us a living after we no longer earn a paycheck. Or in the case of First Church we have an Endowment Fund wherein we invest bequests or designated gifts for the purpose of yielding back to the church dividends and interest into the future without end. In the scripture reading this morning, the apostle Paul says that life itself is an investment.

In the ninth chapter of II Corinthians Paul reminds the Corinthians of a special offering he is collecting from the different churches in Asia Minor on behalf of the Christians in Jerusalem and wider Judea. Paul was familiar with the early churches all around the Roman Empire. He knew which were financially flush and which were economically struggling. The church in Jerusalem was the mother church of all the others. Christianity began with some Jews in Jerusalem. All the Gentile churches to the north had the Jerusalem church to thank for the faith which the Gentile Christians enjoyed. It was also the case that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were for the most part poor while the Gentile Christians in Greece and what is today the Turkish peninsula were more well to do. While asking the Corinthians for economic aid for the church in Jerusalem, Paul says life is an investment.

He starts with an agricultural metaphor. The one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. In other words, the more a person invests, the more interest a person will receive. When it comes to finances we know the saying, it takes money to make money. Paul says that is true for everything else as well. He further says that God has given all of us seed to sow. Here is the direct quote from the letter. *He who supplies seed for the sower, and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.* In other words, God has given us all the means to invest in righteousness. When Christians give

their time or ability or capital to the church it is an investment in faith and hope and love. This is where Paul's idea of life as an investment takes an interesting turn. When the Corinthian church gives money to the Jerusalem church it is an investment which yields righteousness. In the church, monetary gifts yield a spiritual return. Paul asks the Corinthian church to give to the Jerusalem church not so that the Corinthian church can receive for itself financial dividends but so that the Corinthian church as well as the Jerusalem church and the whole world can gain faith dividends. Contributions to the church are nothing less than investments in the moral and spiritual health of the church and the community and the world. *He who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.* The more righteousness invested, even when that is financial benevolence, the more righteousness harvested. When it comes to giving money to the church, the stakes for us and for the world are high.

It may not be a great stretch to apply the life as an investment idea to more than money. Financial generosity to the church would be one bit of righteousness, but would not every act of kindness and helpfulness, of forgiveness and thoughtfulness, of justice and mercy and peace, would not those also be investments that yield a harvest of righteousness. Isn't that the meaning of what Jesus taught when he said that we reap what we sow? Whenever and wherever we do it, whatever we do, is an investment in something, not just how we spend our money, but how we spend our lives. Now, to know this is exciting and hopeful living. This is confidence that what we do makes a difference, that the decisions made by little old me and little old you have consequence, they matter, they result in something, they really do. When times are difficult, when resources are tight, when the need is that much greater, then the importance of the harvest is that much greater too. *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.* Life is an investment. That's what it is. We have nothing to say about that. Our decision is to invest it well.