

“Faith, Money and Racial Justice” by Mike Little

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost



July 16, 2023

Good morning,

Thank you for this invitation to share with you today. Preaching to the choir – I have been inspired by your Racial & Ethnic Justice Ministry Team- commitment to racial justice and your continued weekly vigil. I hope we can continue to learn from one another.

I thought I would start with a little of who we are, [Faith and Money Network](#), (FMN) and what we do. Most of you know and have supported our ministry over the years and a few of you were around when the original call was sounded by Don McClanen and others. Don recognized the relationship between money and fear and anger, and he realized that few people addressed these

problems from the perspective of their faith.

As a first step, Don recruited his mission group to spend a year working with money. The mission group members reported becoming freer from anxiety about their financial situations and freer to use their money creatively. Based on this experience, the first money workshop was held out at Wellspring in 1976.

We incorporated in 1982 just over 40 years now. And I have been working here for almost half of that. Times flies. Hundreds of faith and money workshops have been held since then, providing time, community and resources for thousands of people of faith to explore their relationship with money from the roots of their spiritual beliefs and values.

Today, we still offer workshops and retreats, currently, 2 online courses, a 6-week introduction using a study guide and an 8-month Sabbath Economics Covenant group based off the work of Ched Myers.

We have begun to teach in some seminaries and I do one-on-one spiritual companioning with folks who want a more personal approach. And we have offered, what we now call, Trips of Perspective, – an eye-opening, soul-changing experience where relationships are born and nurtured. We get invited into communities to learn from the joys and challenges making cross-cultural connections between faith and money. Appalachia to Haiti, to our most recent trip to the deep south that I will share more about in a minute.

As I trace our history and look at our path, it is my impression, that we have moved from the beginning days of focus on the **Joy of Giving**. Working with the question: “How much should I give?” Workshops and retreats offering a safe place for people to talk about how much money they had, their

relationship to their money, and what might be a right amount for them to give away. (Christ House was born, and many other of our ministries were blessed financially by those early efforts).

Then we started working with a much harder question: Not just how much should we give, but also, how much should we keep? Or, "How much is enough?"

Gordon Cosby, was a catalyst for this, as he often was- he spoke to one of our Money retreats on this and later preached a sermon in 1990, "How Much is Enough?" (You can find it online or in the Grace Transformed book.)

He writes: *The question for all of us is how much shall we have? What is appropriate, considering who we say we are? The world consists of many people who are satiated, and an increasing number who live in what Walter Brueggemann calls dehumanizing, despairing, demeaning scarcity. In light of this condition, well-known to us, how much should I have? What is enough for me? What should you have? What is enough for you?*

To that question, I have found help from biblical scholar, Ched Myers: The real answer to that question, according to Ched Myers, "what is enough", from a Biblical perspective, can only be answered collectively. We tend to ask that question individually. "What is enough for me?"

Scripture invites us to ask that question as a social question. "What is enough for all of us, so that everyone has enough." Then we can apply our common sense to what is enough for everyone. Adequate housing and shelter, adequate food and clothing, adequate social space, mobility, good work, those kinds of things. When everyone has enough, then any individual who enjoys affluence in the face of someone else's poverty, that person has too much.

So moving from how much do we give...

To how much do we keep, to How much is enough...

To now, working with WHERE do we invest and bank our Surplus Capital, our savings, and investments. What is a faithful response here?

Does it matter? We say a big YES.

Where are money is being held and **WHO** is using it, and for **WHAT** purposes, are deeply faithful questions.

Capital deposited in any financial institution is a measure of power. The institution that holds our Checking, Savings, and Investments is given the right to decide who will get to use that capital and power. So we want to be sure that the institutions using our money, our little or sometimes not so little, measure of power, supports our values the best way possible.

A church protests private prisons on the streets while at the same time their money is invested in banks that support private prisons. The church is thus working against its own protest message.

Many of us, as people of faith, give a portion of our income to help others. Those of us brought up in the church were probably taught to give 10% of our income as a tithe. But what about the other 90%? What about the money we don't give away—the money we plan to spend, save, for emergencies or invest on retirement?

We may recognize God's claim on all that we are, and all that we have, but we still have to pay our rent, send our kids to college and retire.

The good news is that our savings can actively benefit our community and be there when we need it. This is one of those rare and wonderful "Both/And" situations. The money we don't give away can be used on behalf of God's community, and we can

still have it for what we need.

Our savings and our investments can support our faith values and grow for retirement, if we intentionally select where we invest.

As we were leaning hard into these questions of where we bank and invest“ we, like all of you, were hit with the 2020 headlines

Even though through our Trips of Perspective, we’ve built intentional relationships across racial and economic differences, even though we have joined with others to offer money and race workshops and gatherings with churches, nonprofits, even though we were banking at City First DC, a Community Development Financial Institution whose primary goal is to build the economic health of underserved communities in the Washington, DC, area, we still felt like we needed to do more.

If we were on honest, we did not always work with an intentional lens inclusive of history nor racial equity and too often failed to use our platform to confront racial inequity. We set out to do something about it.

One of the very helpful books we read, that helped us move forward, was by researcher and Harvard Business School professor, Steven S. Rogers and his book, [A Letter to My White Friends and Colleagues, by Steven S. Rogers](#) .

He boldly states that eliminating the \$153,00 wealth gap between Black and White people is the solution to over 75% of our problems and offers solutions to help improve Black-White racial relations in the US. Quite a bold statement. The average net worth of white family is 170K, while that of a black family is \$17K.

Rogers proposes 4 action steps for his white friends and colleagues:

1. Donate to HBCU's
2. Support Black-Owned Business
3. Write a letter Supporting Reparations
4. **Deposit Money into Black-Owned Banks**

He proposes that people make large saving deposits into Black-owned banks and credit unions. These financial institutions are the backbone of the Black community and provide loans to the Black community for businesses, education, automobiles, and home mortgages.

Black banks and credit unions have Black-majority ownership or membership, and they most often work in non-white majority neighborhoods typically neglected by traditional banks.

This is a great first step anyone can take to bring more capital into Black communities, especially if you look for a bank that does a lot of housing and small-business lending, because these kinds of loans help families build generational wealth.

Enter **HOPE CREDIT UNION**—Board member, Andy Loving and his work, [Just Money Advisors](#). We learned about [HOPE CREDIT UNION](#), and we were on our way...

Hope Credit Union has its roots in Jackson, Mississippi, where it was organized in 1995 by the members of Anderson United Methodist Church as the state's only church-sponsored credit union.

Since its founding, the minority-led credit union has formed several partnerships, sponsorships and mergers that today enable Hope Credit Union to deliver its services to a largely BIPOC membership in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Slavery was most prevalent in these states before the Civil War, and today the region continues to be plagued by

persistent poverty, with large swaths of the population un- or underbanked and vulnerable to predatory lending practices. HCU strives to build wealth and capital in underserved communities throughout the Mid-South.

Hope Credit Union is the largest black and women run credit union in the country. They primarily serve people of color and women, getting money into the hands of individuals who have been disproportionately ignored by traditional American banking.

HOPE works to strengthen communities and improve lives throughout the Deep South, home to more than 1/3 of the persistent poverty counties in the U.S. In these areas, more than 20% of residents have lived in poverty for at least 30 years

HOPE Exists to Close the Racial Wealth Gap... And we wanted to help!

Our first step was to move some of our savings into Hope and to invite board members and friends to do the same. Then it made sense for us to share this opportunity more widely and we created a Trip of Perspective to do just that.

This was not a Civil Rights tour but we did visit some of the Civil rights sites. Traveling through Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama our aim was to build relationships and make connections between our country's legacy of racial inequity and the ways that anti-Blackness persists today in major systems from home ownership to education to banking.

We centered-on learning about the work of Hope Credit Union and participating in its mission to build wealth for Black Americans in a historically and currently underserved and underbanked region of the United States. Throughout the trip, we made the connection between racism (past and present), the racial wealth gap, and the importance of access to capital for this community, or any community for that

matter to thrive.

While we did visit civil rights sites at each stop, we also were introduced to the work of Hope with both individuals and organizations whose focus is on closing the racial wealth gap. More later on that-

A little about the trip:

First we went to [The Civil Rights Museum in Memphis](#) (The Lorraine Motel).

The next day we went to Birmingham and visited the [Jones Valley Teaching Farm](#).

Hope Credit Union had helped get them obtain an 8 million dollars through tax credits to build this state of the art teaching farm right in downtown Birmingham. Here young students learn how to grow food in raised-bed plots. Children learn how to grow, tend, cook, healthy foods from a top chef in Birmingham. They have gardens throughout the city schools where they are learning the same life lessons.

Our next stop was The [National Memorial for Peace and Justice Museum](#) in Montgomery AL –What some call the Lynching Museum. But it is much more than that.

This memorial opened to the public in April of 2018, is the nation's first memorial dedicated to the legacy of enslaved Black people, people terrorized by lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence.

Work on the memorial began in 2010 when EJI staff began investigating thousands of racial terror lynchings in the American South, many of which had never been documented. EJI was interested not only in lynching incidents, but in understanding the terror and trauma this sanctioned violence

against the Black community created. Six million Black people fled the South as refugees and exiles as a result of these “racial terror lynchings.”

Set on a six-acre site, the memorial uses sculpture, art, and design to contextualize racial terror. The site includes a memorial square with 800 six-foot monuments to symbolize thousands of racial terror lynching victims in the United States and the counties and states where this terrorism took place.

The memorial structure on the center of the site is constructed of over 800 corten steel monuments, one for each county in the United States where a racial terror lynching took place. The names of the lynching victims are engraved on the columns. The memorial is more than a static monument. The Memorial inspires communities across the nation to enter an era of truth-telling about racial injustice and their own local histories.

Walking through the space, you are surrounded by hundreds of six-foot-long steel rectangular structures – coffin-like – suspended from the ceiling and etched with the names and locations of each of the 4,000+ doubly-documented victims of lynchings in our country since the time of the Civil War.

It is unspeakably powerful. The markers that disturbed me the most were placed alongside the walls. On them were the names of people lynched and the so-called reason why:

- Seven Black people were lynched near Screamer, Alabama, in 1888 for drinking from a white man’s well.
- On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old black man, was murdered during a racially, motivated hate crime, while jogging in Satilla Shores, a neighborhood near Brunswick in Glynn county, Georgia.
- Kalab Gadley was lynched in Bowling Green Kentucky in 1894 for walking behind the wife of his white employer.

- Henry Smith, 17, was lynched in Paris, Texas, in 1893 before a mob of 10,000 people.
- A black man was lynched in Millersburg, Ohio, in 1892 for “standing around” in a white neighborhood.
- After Calvin Mike voted in Calhoun County, Georgia, in 1894, a white mob attacked and burned his home, lynching his elderly mother and his two young daughters, Emma and Lillie.

“One of the religious scholars who had listened to them debating and had observed how well Jesus had answered them, now came up and put a question to him: “Which is the foremost of all the commandments?” 29 Jesus replied, “This is the foremost: ‘Hear, O Israel, God, our God, is one. 30 You must love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” 32 The scholar said to Jesus, “Well spoken, Teacher! What you have said is true: the Most High is one and there is no other. 33 To love God with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself—this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.” 34 Jesus, seeing how wisely this scholar had spoken, said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to question Jesus.” (Mark 12:28-34)

“You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind” (Deuteronomy 6:5). “This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ‘ (Leviticus 19:18).

What Bible were they reading? What am I missing now? What will people of faith ask me in 100 years?

One thing I learned, and I must say I am a bit embarrassed

about that I did not know, is that, while we see MLK and the faithful pastors (men) in suits in all the pictures, I was constantly reminded by our guests that it was women and young children (often girls) who lead the civil rights movement.

I recommend another book: [Young and Restless: The Girls Who Sparked America's Revolutions](#), by [Mattie Kahn](#)

- Nine months before Rosa Parks kicked off the bus boycotts, Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery. She was 15.
- In 1912 women's rights activists organized a massive march in support of women's suffrage. Leading them up 5th ave in Manhattan was not one of the mothers of the movement, but a teenage Chinese immigrant named, Mabel Ping Hua Lee.
- Half a century before the better-known movements for workers' rights began, over 1,500 girls—some as young as 10—walked out of factories in Lowell MA.

After leaving the Memorial we drove one hour west to Selma, where, on “Bloody Sunday” in 1965, civil rights marchers were met with brut police force in attempt to break the marchers' will to obtain just voting rights.

We were fortunate enough to hear first-hand what this experience was like. Ms. Joanne Bland was eleven years old and in the crowd lead by John Lewis and others. She related to us what is was like to suffer segregation, as she and her mother would stand outside the local pharmacy watching the white kids sitting on stools at the soda fountain, eating their ice cream cones and spinning on the stools. Her mother said to Joanne, “One day, you will be able to do that, too.”

Again, women and children lead the way.

What was particularly exciting here for me was that while Ms. Bland was sharing with us, she mentioned pilgrimages made to Selma in the last 20 years with participants of our US Congress lead by Representative John Lewis and a group called Faith and Politics. Of course, my eyes lit up and I asked if she knew Doug Tanner and her face lit up and she said, "I love Doug Tanner. How do you know him?"

I don't have time to share our time in Jackson MS and the Mississippi Delta- I am not sure I could even convey the MS Delta and the eerie cotton fields and the home of the infamous Parchman Prison. Let me just say this, that while chattel slavery may be over, debt slavery is alive and well in our prison system. When we heard from a ALCU lawyer working in the prisons in MS you would have thought it was 1923 not 2023. Be sure to ask Jeanne Marcus who, as you know, is very close to this issue.

It was a powerful trip. Our week was full of such clashing images. It is difficult to dwell on the sights of the Memorial, or the balcony where Martin Luther King, Jr. breathed his last, or the Edmund Pettus Bridge. But it is equally heartening to hear the stories of students learning in new schools, homes and businesses being supported, and financial institutions partnering with individuals and community stakeholders to bring about positive change.

Some of you have already moved money into Hope Credit Union, using the Transformational Deposits program. They are money market accounts with checks and you can get your money back when you need it.

Since Hope launched its **Transformational Deposits** initiative in 2021, they have received a total of \$147.7 million in deposits, largely from individuals and companies outside HOPE's service area of the five Deep South states-

Depositors are motivated by the idea that their money, not in

the form of a donation but in a checking or savings account, can fund financial services that are at the root of closing the racial wealth gap.

From Hope's 2022 Impact Report: Here are some of the kinds of projects funded by Hope's Transformational Deposits: purchasing a car, home ownership, saving a home, and owning a business.

An inner-city church of 60 people decided to join together and see what they could do with their little measures of power. This church had annual giving of about \$60,000 from the congregation of teachers and social workers.

They decided to deposit a portion of their savings accounts and emergency funds into an international Christian fund for the poor that provides capital to small microfinance banks that make very small loans to very poor people. Microfinance loans can be as small as \$50 but those kinds of loans make it possible for a person to rent a stall to sell their excess vegetables at a village market, for example, doubling the family income.

These are loans, and the people in this small church can get their "deposits" back at any time. They chose a loan fund with decades of experience and a stellar repayment history to minimize their risk.

The little church and some of their friends started making deposits into this fund, and over a year's period, the deposits reached \$180,000—three times the members' annual giving.

Since then, people have taken their money out for college tuition, to pay bills, and for all the things that happen in life, but much of that money remains in the fund for the poor. The money those church members did not give away has, over the years, provided more than 5,000 loans to people that were empowered to change their own lives and the lives of their families.

This story could happen in thousands of congregations if we take back our measure of power and choose wisely. We may think we have little power, but together, we have enormous power.

So if any of you or maybe even your church is interested in opening a transformational account with Hope I would be happy to point you in the right direction-

Let me close:

Rose Berger- longtime friend of Church of the Saviour, is a Catholic peace activist and poet. She has been on Sojourners staff since 1986. FMN asked her to write a short reflection on our 7 Sabbath Economics Household Practices- one of which is Surplus Capital. I will close with her quoting 4th century, St. Basil, from a sermon he gave to those who hoarded, instead of redistributed, surplus capital. Basil pulled no punches:

“Where have the things you now possess come from? If you say they just spontaneously appeared, then you are an atheist, not acknowledging the Creator, nor showing any gratitude toward the one who gave them. But if you say that they are from God, declare to us the reason why you received them. Is God unjust, who divided to us the things of this life unequally? Why are you wealthy while that other man is poor?”

And then a Haitian Proverb, I love here in English: “God provides, God does not divide or distribute.”

That’s our job...

Amen