

Cycle of Blessings- Currency of Relationship
Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 and Luke 12:32-40

Holy Currencies teaches how ministry can become sustainable, grow, and thrive. Money is not the only currency your ministry needs. Eric Law shows us how the six blessings of time and place, gracious leadership, relationship, truth, wellness, and money flow through successful missional ministries. “At a time when many organizations and faith communities are looking at hard questions of sustainability, Holy Currencies transforms the conversation and offers new hope.” (Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, Claremont School of Theology)

If I were starting transition sessions again with the Sunnybrook Transition Team, I would have used this method to connect with every member of this congregation, whether active or inactive. With the eight members that are on the transition team at Sunnybrook, each of us would have connected with five members making a total of 40, and those 40 would do the same, connect with five members each, making a total of 200, so on and so forth. The exercise would have continued until everyone is connected including friends as well.

According to this theory, “Everything we do or say tends to ripple through a network, having an impact on our friends, (one degree), our friends’ friends (two degrees) and even our friends’ friends’ friends (three degrees). Our influence gradually dissipates and ceases to have a noticeable effect on people beyond the social frontier that lies at three degrees of separation. This means that if one member is happy, his or her friends are more likely to be happy, friends’ friends are more likely to be happy, and friends’ friends’ friends are also likely to be happy. Christakis and James Fowler wrote: “Social networks have value precisely because they help us to achieve what we could not achieve on our own....network influence the spread of joy....”

The connections we have among others, according to the author, include members and leaders, area churches or ministries of the same affiliation, area denominational organizations and national denominational structures. External connections include constructive relationships with non-members, different racial, cultural, ethnic groups in the neighborhood; people with resources and people in need in the community; civic community leaders; ecumenical & interfaith partners; community & civic organizations and local businesses. (AND for us, Red Deer College, Red Deer municipality officials and First Nations people.)

We do not only live in a broken world but we are living in broken relationships: among them are the recent Brexit from European Union, the stand offs between NATO and Russia over the Ukraine, the fight over South China Sea, the tribal wars in Iraq and in Southern Sudan, ISIS’ continuing war not only on people of other faiths but with Muslims as well. The recent attacks in 2016 alone in Iraq, France and Philippines demonstrate the level of violence that has become unsafe for anybody. Relationships between the police and the community, especially in the USA continue to deteriorate.

Angry protests about police using lethal force and racial profiling retaliated by shooting five white police officers at Dallas during Black Lives Matter Protests. President Obama Holding Town Hall to Discuss Race, Gun Violence; aired across multiple Disney Media Networks on Thursday July 14th made an impassioned plea for the nation to do more to address the combative relationship between local police forces and the black and Hispanic communities they serve.

Like us today, where there are growing numbers of unbelievers, Isaiah expressed God's displeasure of their sacrifices and indicated what He desires; **"Wash yourselves, make yourself clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Seek justice. Relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless. Plead for the widow."** (Vs.16-17). The Lord pleads the case with the people, arguing for an outcome other than judgment. God holds out the possibility that the sins of the people can be washed away and in v.18 spells out the blessings for them if they are obedient. The passage itself functions as a call to the people to repent of their sins and change their ways.

For us today, the passage invites us to experience liturgy through the eyes of those we have oppressed, ignored, or abandoned. What do our prayers and hymns sound like to someone who lives on the brink of destitution? Are our prayers and actions able to help families through our generous supports? Does the hope that we preach sound hollow to a child who does not feel safe in her own neighborhood or his own home?

Jesus' exhortation to learn from the birds and the flowers can sound sentimental. In fact, there is a hard realism here. Luke does not deny that birds die and flowers fade. The point is a deeper one: humans have an eternal destiny. Jesus' discourse on fear and anxiety leads naturally to a direct consideration of "whom they should fear," namely the judgment of God that will be carried out at the coming of the Son of Man (12:40).

If we are in good relationship with our God, we are not only free from anxiety but we are also free for life in this world. We are free from fear of scarcity so that we can be generous with others. We are free from the fear of condemnation so that we can forgive others. We are free from the fear of falling short, of failing, of being unacceptable so that we can live for our neighbors, sharing with others the good news that God is pleased to give us all the kingdom.

Life is never finished for us as Christians because the door to eternal tomorrows has been open by the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. For that reason, we seek not to be fulfilled by things and what others think of us, but by the degree to which we can become lovers, forgivers, hope-filled, confident, joyous citizens of the kingdom. Amen.