The Gift of Our Time

By

The Reverend Dr. John M. Willingham

From the Pulpit of

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

October 11, 2026

First Lesson | Proverbs 3:27-28

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go and come again; tomorrow I will give it," when you have it with you.

Second Lesson | Matthew 6:7-13

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray, then, in this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

Sermon

BMPC Gives to the Glory of God.

Those words embody the theme of this congregation's 2027 generosity initiative. They come from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." On that day, Paul was talking about behavior at a dinner table. Yet just as the entirety of Scripture speaks beyond its original context and audience, so are we drawing from his words to inform our call as faithful stewards.

The Christian tradition understands stewardship to include time, talents, and treasures. In two weeks, you will have an opportunity to share your hopes for the coming year in each of those ways as you present a Commitment Card revealing your best intentions for 2027. In preparation for that moment, we will focus next Sunday on the difference it makes when we share our talents with the church. On October 25, we will ponder the blessing that comes in

offering a portion of our treasures here as well. Today, we reflect on the gift of time.

A good argument can be made that time is our most valuable commodity. Each of us only has 24 hours in a day, and the tug on our schedules can be intense. Work and school, family and friends, sports and sleep; each of those life-giving realities requires time. Depending on your season of life, some of those components require more than others, too, but all of us juggle and tweak how we use our allotted hours. Those decisions often include tradeoffs, too. So how might a commitment of time give glory to God? Today's Scripture lessons offer some clues.

The first comes from the Book of Proverbs, where Solomon says, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go and come again; tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you." His words are part of a series of aphorisms naming sins of omission and commission as it relates to such issues as greed, violence, and envy. There are clear themes of justice in what he says, too, but here, Solomon is speaking about how and when we best use our time to bless others.

The second reading recalls one of two moments in Scripture when Jesus offers a model we refer to as the Lord's Prayer. In Luke's Gospel, it comes after his disciples ask for instruction, noting that John the Baptist had taught his followers about such things. Here it happens when Jesus offers two negative examples of prayer—public showboating so that others will notice and piling up empty phrases—before saying "Pray, then, in this way: Our Father in heaven…"

Prayer is an essential part of being a faithful steward, and on the commitment card you will have an opportunity to indicate a resolve to pray for BMPC during the year ahead. That will remain vital as this body of faith continues in a season of transition, yet I'd like to broaden our view of time to consider other ways the church is strengthened by that gift.

Quite simply, your presence here is a blessing. Every time of worship is made stronger by the energy in the pews and the volume of singing that occurs

when people gather. Every small group discussion, every committee meeting, every time of fellowship, every Casserole blitz, every Sunday School class, every event at this church is enriched by your presence. All of our online worshipers strengthen the witness and outreach of this community of faith, too.

That reality doesn't even include moments when someone shares their gifts in a leadership or service role; that's our focus next week. No, I'm speaking of the gift that happens whenever one of you is present for some church gathering. It's not a numbers game, but there is something different that happens when we are together. Ideally, it occurs when we are in the same place at the same time, yet it can happen in other ways, too.

In May of last year, Robert Francis Prevost, a Chicago-born cardinal, became Pope Leo XIV. Two months later, the first American Pontiff made a phone call to his Illinois bank. The Pope identified himself as Robert Prevost, saying he wished to change the phone number and address the bank had on file. He answered the security questions correctly, but the representative replied that she could only complete the change if he came to the bank in person.

The pontiff replied, "Well, I'm not going to be able to do that. I gave you all the security questions." The bank employee apologized but remained insistent. "Would it matter to you if I told you I'm Pope Leo?" he asked. And the customer service representative hung up.

That true story came to light in May of this year when Father Tom McCarthy spoke at a gathering in Naperville, Illinois. He had met the future Pontiff in the 1980s in Chicago, where they had grown up in similar working-class neighborhoods, and had visited his friend at the Vatican. In sharing that account, McCarthy went on to say that the issue was sorted out through the intervention of another priest who had a connection with the bank president. There was no word on the customer service rep who had ended a call with the bank's most famous customer. Yet McCarthy mused, "Could you imagine being known as the woman who hung up on the pope?" (Bosman, Julie "What Happened When the Pope Had to Call Customer Service," www.nytimes.com, 5/5/26).

The Gift of Our Time

by the Rev. Dr. John M. Willingham

None of us gives our time perfectly, yet all of us recognize the blessing it can bring at church and in the fullness of our days.

When I was a boy, my siblings and I would spend a month each summer visiting our grandparents in Greensboro, NC. They lived eight hours away. During our extended stays, they would ask about our friends and fuss over our accomplishments. They would prepare our favorite foods and take us to the Elk Lodge to swim when it was especially hot. They made sure we could see our cousins in Winston-Salem and take us to movies. In sum, they spoiled us rotten!

One summer, I was the oldest grandchild in their home. Both of my older brothers had summer jobs back in Georgia and thus couldn't join us. My grandfather seemed to understand how important that temporary family status was for me. He helped me earn money by mowing the grass for his sister, taught me how to shoot a gun, and invited me along for his errands.

Every few days, he and I would sneak out to a particular location. The signal was when he would announce to my grandmother, "John and I need to go tend to some business," and then we would head to our favorite doughnut shop. While reluctant to offer free advertising in a sermon, I will tell you that it is the place that still turns on an illuminated sign when its product is hot! My grandmother, of course, had a good idea of where we were going and would sometimes want us to admit it. We never confirmed her suspicions.

"Tending to business" was a blessing and not just because it satisfied my sweet tooth. It was our time to swap tales and share my 12-year-old view of the world with him. I enjoyed watching his interaction with the person behind the counter and when he would run into a friend and offer one of his jokes, often sanitized for my pre-adolescent ears. Yet the best part of those trips by far was how important those outings made me feel. Simply being with him one-on-one was the gift I treasured most, and to this day, I never visit that franchise without thinking of him.

I invite you to join Lori and me on Commitment Sunday as we collectively tend to some business at BMPC. The gift

of time is not limited to grandparents. Nor does it require doughnuts. Instead, it is something that each one of us can do. To bless this community of faith and our Maker by choosing to share a portion of our time in this place and in prayer.

Don't underestimate its impact. After all, it's a gift that can only be given by you.