

## “Why do you spend?”

Sept 2010

Hymn “Now thank we all our God” VU 236

Scripture Isaiah 55: 1-3a (New American Standard Bible)

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come; buy wine and milk, without money and without cost.

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.

Incline your ear and come to me. Listen, that you may live.

Prayer Let us pray – O God, you have provided for our every need; good food, shelter, knowledge, skill, friendship, affection. In our ignorance we often feel that these are our possessions by right, in our best moments we know that they are your gifts and behind all life’s wonders we find your very presence. For all of this we thank you. May we spend ourselves and our substance in striving for Christ’s goals. May we hunger and thirst after righteousness. So we would give of our time and our talent, our treasure and our toil in the name of Jesus. Amen

Lesson My wife, Helen, and I have just returned from a driving trip to Charleston South Carolina and back. The occasion was for the wedding of a nephew aboard a cruise ship. The ceremony was short but sweet and sufficient from a legal point of view.

Charleston is a beautiful old city with many fine old Christian churches. We were told that Charleston has more churches per capita than any other American city. We went on a carriage tour and a walking tour and observed the exterior of several of these buildings on Friday and Saturday. As we left Charleston for Myrtle Beach on Sunday morning we noted how full the church parking lots were for the many suburban churches of different denominations along the highways. That was good to see.

And then we came to a Wal-Mart where there were thousands of people “worshipping”. Not worshipping God, but worshipping “stuff”. “Why do you spend your money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” the author of Isaiah asks.

I am in the middle of a book called *Money Enough* by Douglas A. Hicks. He notes that this Isaiah biblical narrative declares that genuine satisfaction is more than instant gratification. It is more than happiness as an emotional feeling or as a fluctuating subjective state dependent on material goods. Why do we spend our money on stuff that doesn’t satisfy? Economists have reminded us that the endless pursuit of consumer goods will more likely place us in competition with our neighbours than provide any sense of enduring satisfaction. We will be chasing consumer happiness that remains just beyond our reach.

Hicks states that he has been reading about how much it would cost to provide basic education, clean drinking water, safe sewage, basic health care, and adequate nutrition for all people in the world. The best estimates for meeting all these basic need for everyone are on the order of \$200 billion per year. Note that the bailout for Wall Street institutions in October 2008 was \$700 billion.

I look forward to completing this book in which there may be more I wish to share in this column.

I will close with a short anecdote. In a large Canadian city a family from a wealthy area was told about a huge bargain food outlet where they could buy groceries for much less than in their own neighbourhood. They drove their van down to the food terminal. The customers weren't quite their kind of people, but the price was right. They loaded up with cases of canned goods and produce. On the way home the axle broke. Sounds like an update of one of Jesus' parables.

Discussion    How much "stuff" do you need?

Prayer        Let us pray – Our God, you have given us so much with your gift of life, yet we wish always for more. We push beyond the boundaries. May we be aware of how that striving creates burdens for those around us. We would pray for all who bear sorrows unseen yet heavy on the heart, those who feel an inner shame that needs the cleansing of your love and ours; those who are exploited for the satisfaction of others, especially for those whom they love. So may our prayers and reflections not be casual this day, but standing in the deep centre of our own needs grant us grace to stretch our hands of care to others in Jesus' name. Amen.