

The Magic Wallet
Luke 8:1-3

When my son was about three years old, we asked him what he wanted for Christmas. He said, "I want a wallet just like Daddy's." I thought, "Isn't that cute. He wants to be like his Daddy." So, I asked him why he wanted a wallet like mine. He said, "So that I will always have money." It turns out that he thought that money just magically appeared in my wallet. If anybody needed money, Daddy just whipped out his wallet, and there was the money. It never dawned on him to wonder how that money got there and what I had to do to get it.

I can't laugh at his innocent naiveté too much. For many years I was much the same way when I thought about Jesus. I knew that Jesus used money. Judas Iscariot was the treasurer. There are stories in the gospels about Jesus sending the disciples to buy food and supplies.

Can you imagine what an undertaking it was to provide food and lodging for thirteen men, as well as others who traveled with them from time to time? Take a moment to think through the logistics and the costs of touring from town to town more or less continuously for three years. We know that sometimes friends or believers would provide food and lodging for Jesus and his disciples. But even at that, the costs of Jesus' ministry must have been enormous.

But we never give it much thought. Jesus certainly never seemed to worry about it. Other than that one time when he needed to feed five thousand people and they couldn't afford the food for that many people, there always seemed to be enough money.

Where did the money come from? Did it just magically appear in the purse that Judas carried? No, it didn't. No more than money magically appears in Daddy's wallet.

Matthew, Mark and John don't tell us where the money came from. I suppose they were a little embarrassed to say. But Luke wasn't. He just comes right out and tells us. The money for Jesus' ministry was provided by his followers.

Jesus wasn't just accompanied by the Twelve Disciples as he traveled. There was always a group of followers gathered around him. There was even a group of women who traveled with him. These followers gave financial support to Jesus' ministry. Some of Jesus' followers were wealthy. Some weren't. The only thing they had in common was that they had all been saved by Jesus. Some of them were saved from illness. Some were saved from demons. Some were saved from guilt and shame. Some were saved from feeling rejected and unloved by the Good News of God's gracious love and acceptance of all people. People who were saved by Jesus' ministry wanted to help Jesus continue his work, both for their sakes, so that they could continue to enjoy being with him, and also so that Jesus could help others too.

The more things change, the more they remain the same. Over the past two thousand years, many things have changed. But one thing hasn't. The work of Christ continues to be supported by people who give because they have received the gift of salvation. They are followers of Christ. They enjoy spending time with Christ. They want to continue to be in the presence of Christ, to hear the Word of God, to feel God's

love, to be immersed in the Spirit of God, to be healed in body and soul. And they want to enable Christ to continue reaching to others with the Good News of salvation.

It's an expensive work.

Our budget here at Chapelwood is nearly \$750,000 this year. That's a pretty realistic budget. By year's end we will spend pretty close to \$750,000.

The good news is that by year's end we will also receive \$750,000. Which is a good thing because our Financial Secretary refuses to write checks unless she has the money to cover them. She's funny that way.

Where will that \$750,000 come from? Well, we don't have a wallet of never-ending money, that's for sure.

The money will come from the same place it has always come. It will come from Christ's followers. It will come from people who have been blessed by the ministry of Christ here in Chapelwood. It will come from people who have experienced salvation in Christ, and who want to support the work of Christ, so that others can also experience that salvation.

We are still working on next year's budget. However you can be certain it will increase.

Where does the money go? Nearly a third of the budget this year was for the care and maintenance of the buildings and grounds. I know that some will say, "What a shame to spend all that money on buildings. It would be so much better to spend it on people." But let's think about this a minute. Who is it that uses these buildings? It's people. I invite you to come up here almost any time, day or night. What you will find are groups of people gathered throughout these buildings. Some of them are our members. Some aren't. Some of them are meeting to learn how to live better lives. Some of them are meeting to help one another. Some of them are meeting to make plans to help other people. In addition to Bible studies and prayer groups and mission groups and men's groups and women's groups and all kinds of Emmaus groups, we have a groups which minister to the sick and the hurting and the grieving in our church and in our community. We have groups that help people learn how to manage their anger. We have A.A. and Ala Non groups. We have Boy Scouts. Because of these buildings, people are able to gather together to help one another and to help others to have better lives. I think Christ is smiling when he sees what is happening in these buildings.

We will spend about \$320,000 on the salary and benefits of our five full-time and five part-time staff and our nursery workers. Some will say, "It's a shame to spend all that money on salaries instead of using it to minister to people." If you hear someone say that, I hope you will answer them by saying, "Our staff does minister to people." That is what we do. This staff cares deeply and passionately about ministering to people. They work long, hard hours to help the members of this church organize themselves for ministry. I think Christ smiles when he sees the ministries of our staff members.

We will spend about \$80,000 on programs within the church: Sunday School, Youth, Vacation Bible School, Worship, and so on.

We will send about \$100,000 to ministries and programs outside of Chapelwood. This includes everything from our support of ministries to the poor in this community to our support of United Methodist homes, schools, and missionaries through our apportionments.

During the next few days, you will make a decision about how much you will give to Chapelwood next year. We have lifted up the suggestion that you increase your giving by one percent of your income until you reach the tithe—ten percent. That's a reasonable and practical approach.

But let me share this story with you. It comes from my father-in-law. Mr. Lock is a retired United Methodist minister. He was a second career minister. He entered the ministry after I did. He performed a wedding for a young couple. It was a small, simple wedding. The boy went to Mr. Lock after the wedding and asked, "How much do I owe you for doing the wedding?" Mr. Lock looked at the bride across the room being congratulated by her friends, and he said, "How much is she worth to you?"

How much should you give to the church next year? How much is Jesus worth to you? He sacrificed his life to give you life, abundant and eternal. How much is that worth? It's worth far more than you can possibly give.

Christ will continue giving the gift of life through Chapelwood next year. It's an expensive ministry. There is no magic wallet. There is no magic account. Where will the money come from? It will come from you. You make it possible for the work of Christ to continue. You are the present day followers who give to support Christ's ministry. You are the Lord's financial backers.

Dr. Wesley Welborn
Senior Pastor