

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Money, Money, Money
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

The richest one percent of this country owns half our country's wealth, five trillion dollars. One third of that comes from hard work, two thirds comes from inheritance, interest on interest accumulating to widows and idiot sons and what I do, stock and real estate speculation. It's bull. You got ninety percent of the American public out there with little or no net worth. I create nothing. I own. We make the rules, pal. The news, war, peace, famine, upheaval, the price per paper clip. We pick that rabbit out of the hat while everybody sits out there wondering how the hell we did it. Now you're not naive enough to think we're living in a democracy, are you buddy? It's the free market. And you're a part of it. You've got that killer instinct. Stick around pal, I've still got a lot to teach you.

- *Gordan Gekko – Wall Street – 1987*

Check-in: *What has been on your mind since the last session?*

Focus Reading:

If money is the bond binding me to human life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all bonds? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal agent of separation? It is the coin that really separates as well as the real binding agent – the chemical power of society.

Shakespeare stresses especially two properties of money:

1. It is the visible divinity – the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and distorting of things: impossibilities are soldered together by it.

2. It is the common whore, the common procurer of people and nations.

The distorting and confounding of all human and natural qualities, the fraternization of impossibilities – the divine power of money – lies in its character as men's estranged, alienating and self-disposing species-nature. Money is the alienated ability of mankind.

That which I am unable to do as a man, and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of money. Money thus turns each of these powers into something which in itself it is not – turns it, that is, into its contrary.

- *Karl Marx – The Power of Money -1844*

The beginning of the twenty-first century is a great time for capitalism. Socialism has been discredited. Countries around the world are opening their markets and removing barriers to trade. America has experienced the longest period of growth that the world has ever seen and produced an explosion of technology that promises to reshape social structures, increase freedom, cure disease, and extend the human life-span. It truly is a wonderful time to be alive.

But despite the prosperity that capitalism has brought to America and the West, it still suffers from an image problem. The old Left-wing critiques are fading; Marxist arguments are rare and social experiments in rent-control, welfare benefits, and the public ownership of capital are being abandoned. But in their place, a different critique of capitalism is catching hold.

This new critique--which, as it turns out, is not so new--does not challenge the effectiveness of capitalism. Capitalism, it acknowledges, is better than any other system at creating wealth, eradicating poverty, and developing technology. The new critique is aimed instead at the

morality of capitalism; it asks if wealth, mass affluence, and technology are really such good things after all.

This new critique, offered by both environmentalists on the Left and by cultural conservatives on the Right, is troubling to many defenders of capitalism. Pro-market pundits have been arguing for years that capitalism's great promise was to improve our lives and free us from necessity. Now that the promise has been largely realized, these advocates find themselves faced with critics--often former allies--who question whether this grand experiment was even worth the trouble.

- Dinesh D'Souza – *The Virtue of Prosperity* - 2000

Focus Questions:

1/ Do you worry about money and whether you will have enough to last your life-time? How does it affect the way you live your life?

2/ Do you believe in Capitalism? If not what do you think is an effective alternative?

3/ What do you think about people such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, who have earned a lot of money, and are now the world's biggest philanthropists?

4/ Are we morally obliged to share our wealth? If so, do we share what we have at any level or do we save for ourselves and then give to others?

Check-out/Likes & Wishes: Has your approach to money been challenged in this session?

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

I work all night, I work all day, to pay the bills I have to pay

Ain't it sad

And still there never seems to be a single penny left for me

That's too bad

In my dreams I have a plan

If I got me a wealthy man

I wouldn't have to work at all, I'd fool around and have a ball...

Money, money, money

Must be funny

In the rich man's world

Money, money, money

Always sunny

In the rich man's world

Aha-ahaaa

All the things I could do

If I had a little money

It's a rich man's world

- Abba – *Money, Money, Money* -1976