



THE MARK

June 2006
Volume 18
Number 6

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony • A Contemplative Christian Community



The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

7406 Newhall Lane Austin, Texas 78746

Non Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Austin TX
Permit # 3386

Financial Freedom

by Tim Cook

I'm sure that you have seen the countless advertisements that offer investors "financial freedom." Virtually without exception the so-called freedom that they are referring to is based on an increased accumulation of the number of dollars promised to those who buy into their system of investment. Now I have no doubt that many of them actually do deliver on the promise of increased dollars. But I hear the words "financial freedom" with a different ear, because my experience has shown me that many people who have accumulated a great number of dollars are not experiencing freedom at all; conversely, many people who have relatively few dollars know and experience true freedom.

Dollars and freedom have nothing to do with each other. They exist on two utterly different planes of human experience, the material and the spiritual. Dollars, whether in great numbers or small, exist on the conditional, material plane; true freedom is an unconditional, spiritual matter that has nothing to do with quantities of anything. Material efforts grow material fruit. Spiritual efforts grow spiritual fruit. Confusing these two very different planes of experience is the cause of much human suffering.

My personal experience in

these matters was dramatic and convincing. In my first post-college decade I had good jobs and made good money. I had a company car, an expense account and great credit that I learned how to leverage to maximize my cash-flow. I owned a house and was accumulating assets. My debts did not seem like a problem because I learned how to keep refinancing them in order to have sufficient cash to be financially free to do all the things I loved doing and to have all the things I loved having. I worried about money constantly but I never really saw it as a problem because I could always get more of it and I was so busy expressing my "freedom" that I was able to "live" in denial of my constant undercurrent of anxiety. Until I lost my job.

Suddenly I had no cash-flow and huge debts and my seeming freedom was gone. I filed for unemployment benefits and began to receive \$135 a week to live on. To my great shame, humiliation and embarrassment, collection agencies began phoning me at all hours of the day and night. I sold everything I could to try to keep the house. Then one night, when it all seemed unbearably hopeless, having sold much of my furniture, I sat on the bare carpet of my empty bedroom and called out to

the God I scarcely believed in and he answered me. A great peace came over me and a powerful certainty replaced my familiar feeling of fear. I felt free.

Within days I was led to a church. With the exception of my dad's funeral, I had not entered a church in the previous 20 years. One Sunday the pastor, Jim Lewis, to whom I am eternally grateful, spoke about tithing; for the first time, I heard, *really heard*, what he was saying about the spiritual principle on which tithing is based. I realized that it was as certain in the spiritual realm as gravity is in the physical realm and that I could trust it accordingly because the spiritual realm controls the physical. I was so excited about what he had helped me understand that I could hardly wait to start tithing.

As soon as I got my next unemployment benefit of \$135, I happily wrote my very first check, before paying any other expenses or debts - \$13.50 to serve the work of God - to the church where I was receiving my spiritual food. Wow! I will never be able to use mere words to describe the incredible, heady, almost intoxicating feeling of freedom I had as I wrote that first check. I had *actually* looked the fear of lack in the face and with a deliberate

and faith-filled action told fear to take a hike. I was truly putting my trust in God to supply my needs. Fear no longer controlled me. I was free and I was acting freely for the first time in my life. And, of course, true to the principle of tithing, abundant supply began to flow into and through my life and I was soon debt-free. More than that, though, I was spiritually free and worry free.

Since that wonderful and liberating moment when I wrote that first check and made my gesture of true financial and spiritual freedom, I have never looked back and never stopped tithing. Just as I did the first time, the tithe is still the first check we write. We don't wait to see if there is enough to cover everything else and then write the tithe check with what is left over. The tithe comes first, just as God is first. And just as Jim Lewis promised when he revealed the tithing principle to me 33 years ago, there has always been enough. God's love has always met and will always meet all my needs.

The principle of tithing is as trustworthy and immutable as the principle of gravity. If I drop something it will fall. If I tithe, I will prosper. In both cases it is the release of holding on that lets the principle take effect. True release means truly letting go. We don't tell the church how to use the money and we don't try to direct it in any way. We simply release the first fruits of our supply to the source of our spiritual feeding and inspiration, knowing that God will

employ it with his infinite wisdom to serve others as I have been served by his use of the tithes of those who have gone before me in the endless chain of Christian community.

The Church of Conscious Harmony is itself a tithing church and has been from its very beginning. In fact, Barbara and I have never served a church that did not tithe and all the churches we have served have prospered. Churches that tithe send the first fruits of all contributions upstream to the organizations that are their sources of spiritual inspiration. Each and every member of our church Board of Directors also tithes personally. We never worry about our financial well-being or the financial well-being of the church. We make it God's business to care for it and we make sure that we know it is God's church by tithing.

I feel great joy whenever I am given the opportunity to bear witness to the amazing grace of tithing because I know that every person who hears, understands and is moved to action by what God has gifted me to share will have the same experience of liberation from financial fear that I have had. And I deeply enjoy being in the company of people who are unburdened of money worries. I pray that our entire community will practice tithing and share the wonderful experience of true and unwavering spiritual financial freedom.



The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512.347.9673
512.347.9675 fax
info@consciousharmony.org
www.consciousharmony.org

MINISTERS

Tim and Barbara Cook

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michael Begeman
Mary Anne Best
Eric DeJernett
Donald Genung
Pamela Gursoy
Edward Pierce
Mary Theriot
Bill Browder, Emeritus
Bob Rader, Emeritus

MUSIC

Susan Boulden, Director
musicdir@consciousharmony.org
Sue Young

YOUTH EDUCATION SERVICES

Deborah Jacobs, Children's Director
childmin@consciousharmony.org
Don Hale, Youth Director
youthdir@consciousharmony.org

OFFICE

Mon-Fri 8:30am-4:30pm
Donald Genung, Business Mgr
bizmgr@consciousharmony.org
Lisa Genung, Office Mgr
officemgr@consciousharmony.org
David Pickett, Facility Mgr
facilitymgr@consciousharmony.org

BOOKSTORE

Sun 9-10:00am & 11:30am-12:30pm
Mon-Fri 8:30am-3:30pm
Mimi Conroy, Manager
bookmgr@consciousharmony.org

NEWSLETTER

JC Shakespeare, Editor
jshakespeare@austin.rr.com
Carol Hagar, Design
lifeisart@austin.rr.com

Bring Your Tithes, the First Fruits, and See If I Will Not Pour You Out a Blessing

by Barbara Cook

I almost don't know where to begin sharing what I've learned in my 26 years of spiritual practice. I've learned that prayer is relationship and that Centering Prayer is both a relationship and a discipline in service to that relationship. The discipline is necessary to deepen and develop our relationship with God. It builds trust and love and also serves to evacuate the unconscious obstacles to that relationship. All spiritual practice has the same purpose: to begin and then to deepen our relationship with God, our loving Source. I'm sure you recall Father Thomas Keating solidly making the point that in Christianity, motivation is everything. The motive determines the result. So a disciplined spiritual practice motivated by a wish to know God and ourselves more deeply will bear good fruit for our journey.

That was how I began my experience with tithing after Tim and I met and he shared his understanding of and gratitude for the practice of tithing with me.

Tithing is a way offered by God in Scripture to help us to know him as our true source of supply and to heal the false attitudes around money picked up from our families and our secular culture. I had been psychologically formed by my family's patterns, and though they were successful by worldly standards, they were more stressful than healthy or happy or free. My reaction was to try to neglect and ignore money. But my attitude was not healthy or happy or free either. And neither my parents' way nor my way of handling money included God.

So as I was beginning my spiritual journey, I wanted a deeper relationship with God and I knew that had to include money. My unhappy, self-guided years in the wilderness had brought me to the awareness that I needed help and a closer walk with the One who loves me and is my true Father. That's when I began a daily time of silent prayer and spiritual studies. I also became active in a spiritual community and began to feel God's love; I felt called to include

tithing in my spiritual practice. I wanted healing in the realm of money and I wanted to know God as my source. I wanted to know for myself the fullness of God's offering: "You be my people and I will be your God."

Now, 26 years later, I know that returning the first 10% of our income to God has taught me countless lessons. It has healed much of my past, helped me to know God's trustworthiness, brought incredible growth and spiritual friendships, stretched me, and revealed God's abundant generosity. It has been a fruitful spiritual discipline in every way. Presently we give 10% of all money that we receive; sometimes it's more but it's always at least 10%.

I am fully aware that God doesn't need our money since everything is already his. The need, however, is ours; to give to the place where we are spiritually fed so that God's place might grow and prosper and serve God's presence on Earth in more people. We always give freely and

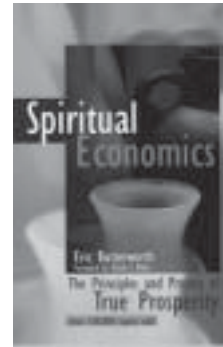
unconditionally, never allocating the funds except when responding to special requests, which are always over and above our usual tithe. The tithe check is the first check we write; we always do it consciously and with thanksgiving for all the good God pours into our lives.

About 20 years ago, inspired by Eric Butterworth's book, *Spiritual Economics*, we started giving an additional 5% of our income for "almsgiving," to charity. This is different than tithing and, again, over and above it. Sometimes, it too, is more than 5%, but our second check is always at least 5% and we send it to an organization that works with people in need, in order to participate financially in God's aid on earth.

Through God's gracious gift of faith we have been able to continue with this level of participation even at times when it looked like we might not have enough. We just went ahead and did it anyway. And, of course, during the entire time we have always had enough, with plenty to share and plenty to spare. But, most importantly, we have continued to develop our ever-deepening relationship with God, watching his action in our lives with continuing amazement. Tithing is like all spiritual disciplines; a person has to try it to get the fruits of spiritual healing and a closer walk with Love.

CCH BOOKSTORE

Exploration on Tithing



Community Reading Begins
June 5th

Spiritual Economics
By Eric Butterworth

Solving the Problem of Supply
By W. Fredrick Keeler

Money and the Meaning of Life
Jacob Needleman

The Spirituality of Money
By Contemplative Outreach



Life in Christ Cards

Each set includes:
12 Cards representing each of
our months in Christ
12 Envelopes
12 Seals



A Life In Christ: Tithing

by Jack Stamps

“Freely you have received, freely give.” ~Matthew 10:8

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, he reminded them of their source and instructed them to freely give. As we ponder and study a life in Christ through a commitment to tithing, Christ is, here and now, passing on to each of us these loving words of wisdom and freedom.

As I look back on my life of tithing and not tithing, two events stand out. In 1982 I decided that I wanted to start up my own business and I went to my father for a \$5,000 loan. He handed me a check without hesitation. I agreed that I would make monthly payments as I was able and I assured him that with my business projections, this would be accomplished in short order. As it turned out, the business failed and for a period of time I was unable to make the promised payments. Dad was very understanding. Later on, when it was apparent that I was back on my feet again, Dad asked when he could expect to see the payments resume. I assured him that I would begin again immediately. I never did. After a few more discussions,

Dad never brought up the loan again. Although Dad’s love and affection for me never waned, through my reluctance to freely give back, I drove a wedge between us that hardened my heart and kept me from having any semblance of a relationship with him. At family gatherings, I would avoid being alone with him. When he called, I would not call back.

Then, almost 20 years later, I met my wife Jacqueline and as we were dating at the time, I somehow told her this story. She looked at me incredulously and suggested that I should immediately start sending him a check every month. The suggestion made so much sense that I sat down and wrote him a check and put it in the mail that afternoon. I began sending checks each month and I haven’t stopped since! I do not know or even care if I have paid off the balance; I just know and feel the joy of freely giving back to a father who so lovingly and freely gave when I asked.

A few years back, as a member of the Church of Conscious

Harmony, I made a prayerful commitment to a daily practice of Centering Prayer, to a daily study of the Work and to the practice of tithing. Several months later I was lovingly asked by some dear friends if I was honoring the commitment to tithe. I had not been. Just as before with my dad, I had written a few checks and then quit when car payments, rent or unexpected expenses came up. The “reasoning” at the time seemed clear; I could get evicted, have my car repossessed or God forbid, have the newspaper canceled, but who would ever prevent me from coming to Church?

I drove around for a few days in a stew of my own self pity and self justification until one afternoon as I drove by the Church it occurred to me that I would be making the final loan payment on my Mustang that week. The loan payment was within a few dollars of ten percent of my salary. I began to ponder what return I was getting for the car payment – the ability to travel from one place to the next – and then to juxtapose that with the return I was

constantly and freely receiving from my Heavenly Father, in large part through the teachings, services and community support of the Church. In making this comparison, I realized, as I had earlier with my father, what a joy and a blessing it would be to freely write that tithe check each month.

It does not matter so much that the first two checks I write each month are to the Church of Conscious Harmony and my father. What matters is that I write them consciously, joyfully and freely. And in doing so, the disposition of freely giving infuses each and every check I write throughout the month. To understand that having received freely empowers me to give freely has been the greatest source of freedom for me. I now enjoy marvelous freedoms like the freedom to love another deeply and be loved, to nurture and be nurtured, to be a good steward, and to enter into a deeper relationship with my family and the community.

If I were a poet, I may have worded this article like this:

For sixty years I have been forgetful every moment, but not for a second has this flowing toward me stopped or slowed. I deserve nothing. Today I recognize that I am the guest the mystics talk about. I play this living music for my Host. Everything today is for the Host.

~Rumi



An invitation to membership in
The Church of Conscious Harmony

*Membership in the Church
is a declaration of intentional relationship
to the Divine Mystery that is God
and to His creation, our brother man.*

*It is formal expression of a personal hunger
to practice and grow in this relationship and to live in deeper communion
with God and our fellowman every day.*

-from the bylaws of The Church of Conscious Harmony

CCH Members commit to . . .

Baptism

A daily Centering Prayer practice

Lifelong study of the
great spiritual teachings

Community service

Annual retreats

Stewardship and tithing

A series of classes and teachings are held to assist your development as a Christian contemplative in our community. Please contact the office or go to the calendar page of the Church website (consciousharmony.org) to learn about requirements for becoming a member of The Church of Conscious Harmony and the timing of the classes.

Taking Pains

by Elizabeth New

The inscription read: “Happy birthday to Elizabeth, One of my favorite authors and books.
Love, Stephanie, December 18, 1991”

So began my introduction to the work of the author Frederick Buechner. His book, *Telling Secrets: A Memoir*, a gift from a spiritual mentor and close friend during graduate school, joined a growing stable of sacred resources that would be important guides over the next several years. With Buechner, I quickly was blessed by his ability to treat tough spiritual and life questions in ways that were poetic and pragmatic at the same time. Here was a man who had deeply wrestled, who did not take anything religious for granted, someone who challenged me to continue to go “further up and further in.”

A few months ago, Buechner again came knocking at my door through his book-long essay *The Faces of Jesus: A Life Story*. Having seen it on a friend’s coffee table, I immediately ordered it on Amazon.com. Despite its compelling cover with four artistic renderings of Jesus’ face, however,

the slim volume sat in my “to read” pile until I was moved to pick it up around the beginning of Lent.

From the first few pages, I was struck by the synergy of timing: on the one hand, the power of absorbing Christ’s life anew during the Lenten journey, and on the other, the poignant connection with this year’s annual church aim of “A Life in Christ.” As I read further, I realized I had not really thought much about what Christ might have looked like, apart from art history class or the occasional random musing. In his paintings, Rembrandt was a master at making Christ and other religious figures holy and human at the same time. Orthodox icons also have given us a semi-tangible way of relating to the divinity and the reality that was Christ.

In *The Faces of Jesus*, Buechner drives home the point that nobody in the Gospels tells us what Christ actually looked like. Still, all of the New Testament is about what he

looked like by the life he led, and how his face is visible in the faces of all those “who ever looked toward him or away from him.” The real kicker is that we ourselves are included in that august group. He reminds us that, if we choose to, we see Christ’s face in our own faces, that the face of Jesus is “the face of our own secret and innermost destiny.”

To travel on this theme through Christ’s life story opened up some new ways of discerning my own spiritual truth. Through the annunciation, nativity, ministry, Last Supper, crucifixion and resurrection, I saw, and am still seeing, where right now in my life I am connected and where I feel separate, where I forgive and where I am hardened, where I serve and where I take, where I love and do not love. In this essay, I am reminded of Christ’s compelling words, “Follow thou me!” and whether I choose his radical simplicity on a daily basis or

remain stuck in my own way of doing things.

Moreover, I see freshly that the beauty of God's plan lies in the essence of his love which leaves us free to respond to Christ—or not. Buechner captures wonderfully our choice between holiness and humanness when he writes:

The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully—the life you save may be your own—and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, get and Jesus says, give.

By the end of the book, I am moved and inspired by many truths—and also divinely entertained by Buechner's inimitable way of punching holes in sacred cows, not unlike Jesus did in his day.

Prior to seeing the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, I expected to be most impacted by the graphic images of Christ's suffering I had heard so much about. Instead, I experienced just the opposite.

While the events of his horrific last days left their mark, it was the scenes of his ministry that profoundly affected me. And Buechner's book illustrates why. During his life, Jesus epitomized the calm at the eye of the storm. People saw "the face of Jesus as light and stillness," a face that embodied the mystery of life itself.

Mercifully, this light and stillness are just as relevant for us 2000 years later. Christ's face is one "we would know anywhere—a face that belongs to us somehow, our age, our culture; a face somehow we belong to." However, Buechner cautions that like the faces of the people closest to us, the face of Jesus can become so familiar we scarcely see it anymore. He urges us to "take pains" to see it. In it, we see the possibility of our own transformation when we are truly ourselves in Christ.

Currently, I find myself challenged more than ever to become my divine self, to cultivate this life in Christ. Workwise, I am endeavoring to realize my creative passions and gifts not in the margins of my life but in the mainstream of it. Each day brings small joys and assuredly larger uncertainties. On a personal level, I am drawn increasingly to what is simple and soulful, but find that

vision collides daily with what our culture chooses - and with what I have allowed myself - to hold most dear. Spiritually, finding like-minded community has been surprisingly elusive since I moved to Dallas for my job; I am learning to just be with that reality while connecting with long-distance kindred spirits and to CCH through road trips and sermon tapes as much as possible.

Despite moments of what Buechner calls "faltering growth toward glory," I receive the grace to take pains to keep the face of Jesus front and center, to cling to the path of Centering Prayer, to live—and not just talk about—connection and oneness. And I am comforted by the mystical fact that Christ wants my transformation into the fullness of my humanity infinitely more than I do.



Godly Play Retreat
June 23-24

This 2-day Godly Play Training Retreat is a Godly Play training and recertification event combined with a Centering Prayer retreat. Lunch and snacks are provided. Parents may arrange child care on site. A \$25 offering helps cover the cost of food and materials. Call the office to register.



Pentecost

If you love me and obey the commands I give you,
I will ask the Father and He will give you another Advocate
– to be with you always. This is the Spirit of truth,
whom the world cannot accept because it neither
sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him
because He abides with you and will be within you.

John 14: 15-17

Pentecost is the principal and crowning feast
of the theological idea of Divine love.

It is, in fact, the crowning feast of the whole liturgical year.

The rest of the year examines the teaching and example
of Jesus in the light of Pentecost, that is, from the perspective
of Divine love . . . The Spirit is the ultimate promise of the Father . . .
a free gift. It is the Spirit who causes us to be one in the Body of Christ.

We have all received the same Spirit, enlivening us and causing us
to be in Christ, in the Father, in the Spirit.

We are in God and God is in us, and the unifying force
is the Spirit. To live in the Spirit is the fulfillment
of every law and commandment,
the sum of every duty to each other,
and the joy of oneness with everything that is.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

Gloria in Excelsus Deo!

JUNE Calendar

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

Ten-Day Centering Prayer Retreat

June 6-15
Call the office for details

Spirituality of Money

classes continue June 7, 14, 21

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Jun 10 8:30am-4pm
Call the office to register

Godly Play Training Retreat

June 23-24 see details on page 9

Taize Service

June 24 7:30 pm

Monthly

Community Workday

June 17 9am-12noon

Weekly

Centering Prayer Group

Mondays 7:30-9pm
Wednesday 7:30-9pm

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30-8:30pm

Sacred Chanting June 6
Gurdjieff Music June 27

Prayer Circle

Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch

Wednesdays 12noon-1pm

Mid-Week Communion Service

Wednesdays 6-7pm

Lessons In Truth

Wednesdays 7:30pm

Yoga

Thursdays 6-7pm

Intro to The Work Class

Thursdays 7:30-9pm

Daily

Daily Centering Prayer Service

M-F 7-7:35am