

32963 Article – Faith Column
By Rev. Drs. Casey and Bob Baggott
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Building Something Holy

What are you able to build with your wealth? In our strained economic environment, we frequently hear people talking about reassessing the utility of their money. Though they may technically have less materially now than before, they tell us they have discovered how much they still have spiritually. Consequently, they feel fortunate, they say, and are actually more ready to give of their wealth now than before. Apparently, it sometimes it takes a life-altering event or circumstance to open our eyes to what we truly value, or to value what we already have.

An old legend tells of two brothers who reassessed what they valued when they learned their father had died. The two brothers had lived very different lives. The older brother was very successful and had grown very rich. But he had never married and did not have close friends, because he spent all his time working. The younger brother, on the other hand, had a large family and many friends. Although he worked diligently all his life, he had never accumulated much. It seemed as though his money barely fed his large family.

When the two men received word that their father had died, they realized that the family farm would need to be divided between them. Surveyors were hired to come and mark the land for equal distribution between the brothers.

The brothers stayed at their childhood home while they concluded their father's affairs. One night, as the older brother was lying in bed, he thought of his younger brother's circumstances. With his big family he could use extra income. The older brother thought, "I am rich and already have plenty. I will go out in the dark of the night, and move the marker that divides the farm in half, in order to give a bigger portion to my brother in need."

Meanwhile, the younger brother was lying in bed and thinking about how his older brother was all alone in the world, without family or friends. He, on the other hand, was blessed with a large family and many friends. He thought to himself, "All that my brother has to remind him of our father and happier times is this piece of land. I will go out in the dark of night and move the marker that divides the farm in half, in order to give a bigger portion to my brother in need."

That night, in the middle of their father's field, the two brothers met. When each heard what the other was doing, they embraced and wept. Legend has it that the city of Jerusalem was built upon the very spot where the brothers' tears fell. A holy place was established where generosity and compassion were enacted.

This legend seems to confirm something we are witnessing these days. Generosity and compassion are not in short supply. Though the economy is forcing many of us to make some tough decisions and to reassess our net worth, still, we have the capacity to give to others.

Perhaps that is why Edith Falk, Chair of the Giving USA Foundation, could conclude her comments on American giving patterns by saying: “This year's report shows Americans continue to give when faced with hardships. Even in difficult times, Americans will dig deep to support those organizations that they care about and they feel are making a real difference in meeting human needs in their communities. We're an amazingly generous group of people.”

Do you consider generosity and compassion to be important parts of your net worth? We hope so. Something holy can be built upon them, in every life!