

Weekly Teaching

February 1, 2019

I am looking forward to my dear friend and colleague, The Rev'd. Dr. James B. Lemler, returning to Greenwich next week and sharing with our congregation his insights into the mitzvah of generosity.

We know Rev. Lemler as a neighbor, clergy leader and co-founder of the Sholom Center for Interfaith Learning and Fellowship. What you may not know is that during his years of service and leadership, he was involved in a variety of philanthropic endeavors focused on learning about how generosity impacts the life of faith and religious institutions. He has been the founder of a consortium of Episcopal parishes with major endowment responsibilities. He has also done research through the Lilly Endowment and the Lake Institute of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. His retirement job is as an executive with the Allen Whitehill Clowes Charitable Foundation, an Indianapolis-based arts and humanities foundation.

Below is an adaptation of one of his recent articles.

Shabbat Shalom,
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...Do we have enough?

What does the future look like?

Can we balance the available resources with the needs around us?

These are national questions, but they are also state and local ones.

States far and wide are having to make very difficult budget decisions, and so are counties and local municipalities.

But the budget balance issues are even closer to home.

How do you make ends meet in your own home?

How do all sorts of organizations and institutions balance their budgets in these lean economic times?...

...Holy Scripture is not an economics text book, but it does have a lot to say about money, priorities and leadership.

If you read the Hebrew Scriptures, you will find that the nation of Israel is instructed about finances and use of resources quite regularly.

Attention is always to be given to those who have the least, and people are to exercise generosity and use resources for the betterment of the whole people.

Selfishness and callous disregard for the poor have dire consequences...

...money can consume the human spirit or it can be a source for generosity, service and stewardship.

As I said, the Bible is not an economics text book, but I believe its messages have a lot to say to a country, a state, a locality, an institution, an organization, a family or an individual that is struggling with how we balance our budgets.

It reminds us that God is the originator and giver of all that we are and all that we have.

It calls us to be the best possible stewards we can be and to focus on the things that really, really matter rather than mistake wants for needs in our lives.

It says that a nation is accountable for the way it uses its resources, and that particular attention must be given to those who are at greatest risk.

And... it calls on people who are making decisions (a.k.a. leaders) to do so with holy fear and trepidation, deciding on the patterns of economic policy with an attitude of service and vision (not rhetoric or posturing).

So, the Bible's not an economics text book, granted, however, its wisdom might actually help all of us balance budgets in faithful, wise and hopeful ways.