Singing: “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree to see what he could see!” Did any of you learn that song when you were a child? (Raise your hand.)

That childhood song left me with the impression that Zacchaeus was a good little guy. And since he was a nice person, out of all the crowd that was clamoring to see Jesus, Jesus chose to go to his house. The subliminal message for us wee ones was that if you are a good little boy or girl, Jesus will want to be with you.

It pains me to tell you that’s not exactly the gist of the story. Luke says, “Jesus entered Jericho and there was a man who lived there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and rich.” When the first century audience heard this story, they immediately knew that this was a story about a scoundrel. To say that he was a tax collector meant that he collected taxes from his neighbors and handed their money over to the Roman oppressors. In rabbinical literature, a synonym for tax collector was “robber.” Because not only did they collect money and hand it over to the despised Romans, but they also took a little extra to fatten their own purse. Apparently, Zacchaeus gouged the people because Luke informs us that he was rich.

Since Zacchaeus was an ambitious man, it’s not surprising that he figured out a way to secure a prime spot for viewing Jesus. He climbed into a tree for a good view over the crowd. When Jesus reached the sycamore, he peered up at the wee little man perched in the tree and told him to climb down because he was planning to stay at his house. Zacchaeus was thrilled by the honor, but everyone else was miffed and grumbled, “Why is he getting cozy with a crook?”

But when Jesus welcomed himself into this tax collector’s life, something began to happen. Zacchaeus underwent a transformation. He began to see life from a new perspective. He realized for the first time that gaining wealth is not the chief purpose of life.
The transformation was dramatic. He said, “Lord, I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone, I’ll pay back four times as much.”

When we allow Jesus to play a prominent role in our lives, priorities shift, relationships change, and our view of what is essential is revised. One of the primary ways we are transformed is that we become generous. We no longer grasp our wealth as tightly. We become aware of how important it is to give.

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Jerry Spilecki

Sue and I have been members of Westminster since 1985. During the past years we have been involved in various church activities and commitments.

While thinking and writing about why I love Westminster and support the church financially, a cascade of memories and observations come to mind. But let me start with this memory. It was during the “Summer of Covid” and we were not having services at the church. Each Sunday morning, led by Greg, Camilla, and Bill Nace and a few other helpers including myself, we met in the parking lot for an hour or so. We received food, water, and supplies donations from members for the Sunday Breakfast Mission. People would pull in the lot and line up and we would, in turn, unload each car and organize and load up the three cars that would transport the food to the Mission. By the end of the hour the three vehicles used were completely full! It was contact free and was done so efficiently. During that hour, Sue Spilecki played various hymns from the Tower Chimes the entire time. I thought then, as I recall now, “This is really special! This is Westminster!” I’m reasonably certain that if you think back, you will recall something that you have experienced with the same recognition that I have. This is our church!

Our Stephen Ministry Program helps members who are facing personal, often difficult challenges such as: the death of a loved one; a troubling diagnosis; loss of a job; divorce; events that are never simple to resolve and typically affect various aspects of life. I was fortunate to have received a Stephen Minister back in 1997 following the death of our son, Jay. I was struggling to say the least and Dr. Chuck Miller was my Stephen Minister and he supported me and helped me get back on track with living, my Faith, and the challenges I was facing. Today I am a Stephen Minister and committed to helping others in our congregation.

Our Better Days Grief Support Group, in its fourth year, plays an important role in supporting those who have suffered the death of a loved one or, perhaps, did not have the opportunity to grieve for one reason or another. I can tell you as a co-facilitator of this program that the experience does help grieving individuals get a new outlook, a spiritual “lift”, and a hope that living life without that person they lost is possible.

Westminster does many things, big and little, to meet the needs of people both within and outside of these walls. Our pastors provide continuous and consistent spiritual care through their presence, sermons, prayers, and guidance. Our music programs are nothing less than stellar and both the gentle
beauty and power of the music inspire us. The children’s programs, the nursery, and children’s choir are so important.

So, I may have “primed the pump” so to speak, in sharing just some of what Westminster offers to each of us. If you take some time, you will think of numerous things that make our church so very special. It is so much more than that place we go to on Sunday.

We all know from our own lives that costs continue to increase. And they do here as well. This is “OUR” church and we are blessed. Let us consider this fact and give our best financial support.

Jessica Fischer

Matt and I have been attending Westminster for nearly 3 decades since we were married and moved to Wilmington. I’m happy to stand before you today to share why Westminster is so dear to us and why we are dedicated to supporting Westminster financially.

Westminster has been a steadfast foundation in our lives as a couple and a family. I love attending worship at Westminster on Sundays. It is a perfect way to begin the week. Sunday worship re-centers me, helping me to refocus my thoughts and priorities. It’s a spiritual Haven that provides the nourishment my soul craves. The sermons challenge and inspire me, prompting me to draw closer to God and motivating me to be a better person. The music at Westminster touches my soul. When I hear the choir sing, I feel a powerful connection to the divine. I love the beauty that surrounds me in our sanctuary. Worshiping in this beautiful, sacred space enriches my life. I am grateful to be a part of this community of faith. I am amazed by all of the activities and educational opportunities offered here and am proud of how much Westminster contributes to the Wilmington Community, and how committed Westminster is to making a difference in our community and the world.

I will forever be grateful for the special people (both staff members and members within this congregation) who played a vital role in helping my sons, Ben and Ryan, grow in their faith when we were a younger family. The guidance, love and mentorship provided by this church community were invaluable in nurturing their spiritual journeys.

In our support of Westminster financially, Matt and I recognize that we are investing in more than just a building; we are investing in the growth and well-being of our faith community. This church has given us so much over the years, and it is an honor and privilege to give back. We want to ensure that Westminster continues to be a pillar of strength in our community and a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Westminster Presbyterian Church holds a unique and cherished place in our hearts. It has been the foundation of our lives as a couple, providing us with spiritual nourishment, inspiration and a loving, welcoming community. We are especially grateful to our remarkable leaders, Greg and Sudie, the members of Session, the Trustees, Tony and the choir, the deacons, the videographers and the many
volunteers that help our church thrive. We pledge our continued financial support to help our Church continue its mission and serve our community.

Dan Weintraub

Good morning. I want to start with a quiz – Jones, Thurman, Neisen or Thompson, Weintraub. Which one doesn’t fit? I can even add my mother’s maiden name Duberstein. As a child I had no religious upbringing. In fact, for the first 55 years of my life, I was not involved with any church or synagogue in any way.

I can clearly remember when my then girlfriend Nancy Anne Fleming brought me to the balcony of Westminster in 2013. I was taken by the beauty of this sanctuary but also quite unsure of all the proceedings of the service. I heard about the narthex, and I thought it was a medication. I heard about Session which has a much different meaning in my world as a psychologist. Later on that year we went to dinner with Camilla and Greg. I remember asking Greg, “What do I call you?” He said “Greg.” I thought that was easy.

On June 7, 2014, the best day of my life occurred right here as Nancy Anne and I got married. I remember coming out of that door right there behind Greg to a big ovation. I thought that was pretty cool. Deacon Robin Rosser called it a clapture. Through sermons, meeting so many caring people, and self-introspection, I decided to join. Greg baptized me in 2015. We both agreed that he wouldn’t carry me down the aisle to introduce me to my new family.

Within the service, I appreciated the sermons, the Prayers for the People, Time with Our Children, and incredible organ music. Camilla asked me to be a Communion Steward, and I liked, and still do, being able to provide a small part in Service each month. Through serving at Saturday morning breakfast, hosting Family Promise, delivering flowers for holidays, taking minutes as Secretary for the Trustees, and now serving on Session, I am proud to represent Westminster.

All the various missions that this church is involved in are so important, so caring, so Christ like. All this has helped me feel the meaning and significance of the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of giving and humility, all of which Westminster exemplifies. To quote Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Somewhere along the way, we must learn that there is nothing greater than to do something for others.” To quote the band the Avett Brothers, “You and I, we’re the same. Live and die we’re the same.” I have learned that everything we have is a gift, and in return, we give what we can to help others. I am honored to have a spiritual outlet of Westminster to do so.

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Truth be told, I really wanted to carry Dan down the aisle. He was just too afraid I’d drop him. On purpose.
Jerry, Jessica, and Dan have done a beautiful job of reminding us of some of the marvelous ministries of Westminster and the need for supporting our church financially. I want to quickly mention three reasons we give a portion of our wealth to the church.

First, we give because without our financial support, Westminster will cease to exist. Without funds to pay salaries, to buy church school curriculum, to support local and global missions, and to pay for utilities, the whole enterprise implodes. In the same way it takes money to maintain a home or business, it takes money to keep a church running. Do you have any idea what our utility bill is each year? It is $58,000. And that is down $13,000 from what it was 15 years ago thanks to our solar panels, insulated windows, and LED lightbulbs. Our total budget is $1.7 million. Thanks to our endowment fund that has built up over the years, our endowment covers 27% of our budget. The other 73% must come from our financial gifts. Without our contributions this church vanishes, and vital ministries are crippled.

Second, we give a portion of our wealth to the church for the health of our souls. On numerous occasions, Jesus taught that to demonstrate that money does not have a death grip on us, we must give some of it away. Every major religion beckons its adherents to give away a portion of their wealth to keep greed and envy at bay. A friend suggested that we should all be in a twelve-step program. Each day we crawl out of bed we should say, “I am an addict to my lifestyle. I keep spending money on things I do not really need.”

And the best reason for supporting Westminster is to express our thanks to God. Making a financial sacrifice is a tangible way to say, “Thank you” for the gift of life.

If you have not yet made a pledge to the church, I urge you to do it before the end of this week. And when you fill in the amount you will give, I hope it will come from a place within you that is being transformed as you strive to become more generous.

NOTES
1. The Message translation.