



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

760 East Broad Street • Columbus Ohio 43205 • (614) 221-6552 • fax (614) 221-5722 • [www.bspsc.org](http://www.bspsc.org)

### “Indebted”

Colossians 3:12-17

May 5, 2019

Reverend Amy Miracle  
Broad Street Presbyterian Church  
Columbus, OH

As of 6 a.m. this morning, the U.S. national debt stood at over 22 trillion dollars. It has grown since then, believe it or not, at the rate of about \$45 per second. Americans’ collective personal debt surpasses 4 trillion dollars.<sup>1</sup> Student loans contributes 1.5 trillion of that number; money owed on credit cards another 1 trillion.

That’s a lot of debt. Most of us in this room owe money to someone or something: mortgage company, bank, credit card company, the IRS.

Taking on debt can open up opportunities – to have reliable transportation, get a good education, own a home. Debt can also be crippling. Too much debt can lead to worry, fear, shame, a sense of hopelessness.

To be debt free is a good thing, right? It offers a sense of freedom and independence, peace of mind. It can be a source of pride. “I don’t owe anybody anything,” I want to be able to say.

Except, well, I do owe lots of people lots of things. I am in debt to so many for so much.

- I am in debt to my 9<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher for sharing with me her delight in language and books.
- I am in debt to my parents for communicating to me that the world is a broken and hurting place and that every human being has a part to play in repairing that brokenness.
- I am in debt to the Presbyterian Women of Westminster Church in Dayton, Ohio who paid for me to go to San Francisco one summer as a Volunteer in Mission in a community center in Chinatown. That experience changed the trajectory of my life.
- I am in debt to Dan and Joyann Buss, at the time a couple in their early 30s, who paid my rent during seminary.
- I am in debt to people I have never met, authors, poets, novelists whose writing has spoken to my very soul.
- I am in debt to mentors who inspired me, supported me and challenged me.
- I am in debt to good friends who tell me the truth when I need to hear it and share their time and love so generously.
- I am in debt to God for ... well... everything.

Do you see where I am going with all of this? None of us live a debt-free life.

So, who are you in debt to?

I’m no longer talking about money. I won’t be talking about money for the rest of the sermon. No, I am talking about the non-financial part of our lives. And so I ask again:

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/21/consumer-debt-hits-4-trillion.html>

Who are you in debt to?

Bill Leety, retired Presbyterian pastor and poet and, in his retirement, BroadStreeter, wrote the following poem about this kind of debt.

*To Carlos Enrique Soto Sanchez, Cardiologist*

“You’re gonna miss voting in the election”  
barks the man in green scrubs running  
my gurney down a corridor through  
open doors under the lights  
“You’re having a heart attack!”

“Carlos Sanchez, Cardiologist”  
you introduce through your surgical mask  
The day’s noon-duty is your draw  
and my luck, blessing or sparing

I announce as taught, “I have living  
will, medical POA” and you deadpan  
in reply, “nobody dies in the cath lab”—  
the dare you dare every day  
and I now am partner in your dare

“Happy juice” you say, “to keep you  
awake, alert to move as I instruct.”  
You guide a probe through my right arm artery  
to fasten a stent and perhaps initial  
“*Sanchez was here*”

I watch your deft hands work years of education,  
practice, muscle memory. I remember  
Ernie Banks at bat; “It’s all in the hands” they said  
and in your hands this lab feels safe as Wrigley Field  
Someone introduces another

“Dr. Carlos Sanchez,” observing, learning  
new touch for his hands and practice  
I smile looking for your father  
thinking of my sons and daughter and what  
thrill to be so instructed by a child at work

So it is I walk in joy and treasure my debt—  
and your dare—  
to live another Christmas and die another day

*Bill Leety, debtor 3-18/2018 early afternoon<sup>2</sup>*

Bill so beautifully describes the debt he owes his cardiologist.

---

<sup>2</sup> Used with permission of the poet.

Who are you in debt to?

It's a lovely question that gets us thinking about the most important people and most meaningful experiences in our lives.

Today, we are recognizing and honoring high school graduates.

Graduates, my message for you this morning is simple.

Go into debt.

Again, I'm not talking about money. I'm not talking about student loans. I'm talking about the non-financial part of our lives. I'm talking about receiving help, support, love, encouragement. I'm talking about the human connections that make life bearable and make life beautiful.

Graduates, go into debt.

I'm betting that you can already name people to whom you owe a debt of gratitude:

- Friends
- Teachers
- Grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles
- Coaches
- Conductors
- Maybe even your parents

High school graduates, I'm hoping that your list is long and that it will grow longer in the years to come. Today we give thanks to God for all who have shaped us and loved us and carried us and for those we have not yet met, who will shape us and love us and carry us in the future.

I suppose it's possible to live without this kind of debt. To be autonomous, self-sufficient, to neither accept nor offer help. It's possible. Just keep telling yourself. "I've got this." Value control over vulnerability. View asking for help as weakness. When things go wrong, tell yourself "this is my burden to carry alone." It's possible, I suppose, to pull off a debt-free life. But it's no way to live. It's no way to live. We all need help, support, encouragement, love. We need people who love us.

I'm talking about the people who love us despite our messy lives and stay connected to us through our struggles. I'm talking about people who when relationships are strained or broken, they do not give up, they extend the invitation to reconnect, they work through misunderstandings with sensitivity and transparency. It is a good thing to be in debt to such people.

So, graduates, go into debt.

I have to be honest with you. Living an indebted life can get complicated. You can't keep a balance sheet. All you can do is accept the time, energy and love of others with gratitude, knowing you can't respond in kind. And, offer your time, energy and love to others with no expectation of being paid back. It works better that way. Because, sometimes we have the privilege and responsibility to be the love that carries others. Sometimes we have to let others carry us.

Speaking of a love that carries, it's time to talk for a minute about God. There's this glorious, life-changing, beautiful debt we owe to God. It is the unearned favor of God, unconditional love given regardless of merit. The word the church has always used to describe that love is "grace."

It's the love that we talk about in baptism when we say, "God has always loved you, God will always love you." God's grace is the context for our lives – the jumping off point and the landing strip. God's unconditional love for us is the fabric, the texture, the air we breathe. It encompasses us and carries us and also pushes and challenges us. It is everything.

We haven't earned it. We don't deserve it. We can't give it back. It is given to us. All we can do is say thank you. All we can do is share that love with others.

You see, we are indebted to God for so much. Graduates, may the debt you owe to God deepen, as you discover and rediscover the joy of living in this God-created world.

Graduates, on this milestone Sunday, I say to you, go into debt.

Amen.