

*Stewardship Sermon
24 Pentecost / Proper 27 / Year C
11 March 2007
Preached by the Rev. David Fredrickson*

Over the next two weeks as we move through our stewardship campaign, we are going to focus on this issue. First of all, I hope that you won't be scared away by this conversation and secondly, I hope that you will join me in approaching it with an open mind and an open heart.

Stewardship is a word that, unfortunately, has a bad connotation for many of us in the church at large. For most of us when we hear that word we automatically think of the church budget and the annual fall stewardship campaign where the pressure is applied to give more and more of our financial resources to cover it. Most of us have a rather negative taste in our mouths for this word I suspect because of the poor job the church has done over the years in teaching anything of the grace and the power and the freedom of real Christian stewardship. Stewardship really has nothing to do with money or church budgets. It has everything to do with our identity in Christ and our response to being made in God's image and redeemed by the cross of Christ.

My intention this week was to have a lay person come up and preach a sermon on what stewardship means to them. I was unsuccessful in my persuasion, but what I did receive from one of you sitting out there this morning is a profound reflection on the question, "Why do I give to God?" With permission, I want to read you all this reflection. It is one of the best reflections that I have ever read on what the true meaning of stewardship is. This reflection is entitled, "Why do I give to God."

Why do I give to God? Before I answer that question, it's important to ask, what do I give? I give my *everything*. My money, my day, my marriage, my relationships, my decisions, my future, my past, my praise, my worries, my plans, I give my *life* to God.

Not perfectly. Not always. I'm a work in progress. Sometimes I need to remind myself to "hand it over to God." Sometimes that's easy to do. For instance, before stepping out of bed in the morning, I may pray a prayer like "Thank you God for a good night's sleep and for the good health of my family. I pray that today you will help me to love others. Help me to walk in your will for my life today." - At other times, depending on God can be difficult. "God I'm stressed out and I have no patience for others. I don't feel like being a kind person and I'm in a rotten mood. Please help me to reach out in faith to you. Help me to feel your love, so I can share it with others." - And sometimes *falling into the arms of God* is the only option I have. "Dear God, I have no control over this situation. I have no idea what is about to happen. I'm scared. There is no one I can turn to, because no person can fix this problem, only you are able. Please help me."

You see I give my *everything* to God, because God can handle the load. He promised to share my difficulties. I read in the book of Matthew: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." God never said that *life* would be easy or that my heart would never ache. God never said that He would pass over me when troublesome times came. I haven't been spared. Just like everyone else, I've had my share of heartaches. Young friends who have died, illness, miscarriage, hard financial times, medical, mental *and* substance abuse problems *all* within my family, being responsible for others when they have been in times of crisis, even holding the face of a loved one as he drew his last breaths. As I remind myself of all these pains my heart races, and tears come to my eyes. As I look back, I realize that during these *falling into the arms of God* times I had no control. There was *nothing* I could do during any of these moments that could have changed history. I needed God, so I prayed. God didn't stop my friend from dying, but He held me, and my

friend as we said goodbye. God didn't instantly give my spouse and me the down payment we so desperately wanted for that tiny little worn-down house we looked at, but we were blessed with stable jobs, health insurance for our family, and eventually, we were able to afford to build our own home.

Over the years I have prayed, and one way or the other, my prayers have been answered. Most times not as I have envisioned. God usually takes whatever idea and perfectly-plotted-plan of how I want to receive my blessing, and chucks it out the window. What I end up with though, is an unscripted learning experience that inevitably includes love in its lesson. Of all the things that I pray for, it is most often love that underlies it all. I pray to receive love from God since God is the source. I pray to have an open and willing heart to allow Him in, to use love in my decision making, rather than being led by my own selfish desires, to have love in the form of compassion, understanding and forgiveness and ultimately to have love to give.

I can offer love by playing with my kids. I can offer love by helping out at Good Shepherd's Table and the Good Shepherd's Food Pantry. I can offer love by listening to a stranger tell their story. I can offer love by praying. I can offer love by inviting my friends and their two *high-strung* kids in for dinner, which makes 10 at the dinner table unexpectedly. But, we always have enough. Kind of like the never-ending supply of oil in the Temple that our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate in Hanukkah

God gives enough for me and my family to have enough left over to share. Which reminds me of what I give to the church. Just a year ago my family gave only a fraction of what we give now. It was with a *huge* leap of faith that we decided to tithe. We now give 10% of what we earn to God. That means scaling back on things we may not have given too much thought to before. It means not having as much control as we think we'd like. But so far, just like His guidance, His

comfort, His healing touch, His Love, God continues to offer Himself freely and without holding back. So I too must respond with love and without holding back-my *everything*, my all.

In Jesus Name; AMEN.