

*25 Pentecost / Proper 28 / Year C
Luke 21:5-19
18 November 2007
Preached by the Rev. David Fredrickson*

Last Sunday I gave you a bit of a heads up when I said that we were going to focus on stewardship for the next couple of weeks. I also asked you, if you remember, not to play hooky knowing in advance that I was going to preach a stewardship sermon. I then proceeded to read a meditation on stewardship written by one of you; a marvelous and very personal reflection on Christian living from a lay person's perspective. This morning I want to offer another perspective on stewardship. I have to say, however, that following last week's reflection is not going to be an easy task, but I will give it my best shot.

Because I want to set the tone early, the first thing I want to say this morning is this; stewardship is NOT about money or the church budget. I have said this before and I want to reiterate it again here this morning. The church budget is a fact; we all know this. It costs money to do ministry in the community, to be present to the needs of those who struggle with their lives. A prominent community figure told me recently that when Good Shepherd is on top of its game serving the marginalized people of Wareham, the community at large is more aware and more active in serving the needy, but when Good Shepherd turns inward and becomes less active, the community at large follows suit. I believe this, and I shudder to think what this town would be like without our vision and our vibrance. In fact, I shudder to think what Wareham would be like if any of our great churches closed up shop. I know that Marion was certainly dealt a big blow when the Methodist Church there had to close this past summer after carrying on a ministry there

for, I believe, more than a hundred years. We all know that it costs money to do ministry in the world, but money is not the central focus of stewardship.

The world you and I live in is a very strange place, a very fast-paced, very violent, very beautiful, very mysterious place indeed, and our time in it is fleeting. The pace in which we live our lives is truly remarkable. I think back at how different my childhood was from what my children are experiencing now. I tell both of my sons to focus on one thing at a time, to do it well and yet, I realize that they both will have to become masters of multitasking in order to be competitive in this fast-paced world that we have created. In fact, I suspect that they already know more about multitasking than I do. And yet I believe with all my heart that multitasking, running from one job to the next, from one place to the next, from one thought to the next, is slowly killing our souls. The speed at which most of us live our lives, even in retirement, precludes us from any real, substantive reflection. Without it we wither and die. Being fully wired might keep us up to the minute with what is happening in our world, but it is taking us further and further away from the one who made us, the one who redeemed us, and the one who sustains us even while we are not paying attention.

So when we tie stewardship to the church budget, the church building, the next church meeting or the next big project, we are simply giving each other one more thing to run to, one more thing to multitask, one more thing to balance, hoping and praying that it is not the one thing that brings it all down. It is this understanding of stewardship that brings about fear and anxiety, not peace and joy.

So what I want to ask you to do today is to stop, stop running so that you can think about your life. The late Anthony De Mello, Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, in

his book *Sadhana*, has this fascinating little spiritual exercise. In the exercise he invites his readers to do something that most all of us would rather not do; take a mental and spiritual journey to the moment of our own death. As you lay there taking in your final breaths, he asks, what do you imagine will be going through your mind and your heart in that moment? Once the running is about to stop in earnest, what will you have to show for your efforts? Think about that for a moment. This is the moment, I believe, when we will discover whether or not we have been good stewards of our time, our talent, and our treasure. When the world can't use us anymore and we realize that what we have accomplished probably isn't going to live a moment beyond us, that all the running we have done isn't going to save our soul, it is at this moment that we will fully understand our true identity and we'll either rejoice or be filled with remorse and regret.

This morning, you and I must choose to stop running. This is the first act of practicing good stewardship, to stop running. Once we have accomplished this (and we all know it isn't easy) then we can start thinking and praying about all the other choices we have in our lives. The message of the society we have created is clear, *you can have it all*, but we all know, deep down inside that this just isn't true. It is tempting to keep our options open, just in case things don't work out the way we expect them to; enter the prenuptial agreement and the 30-day money back guarantee. But our Lord in this morning's gospel warns his followers not to be lead astray. The world and all that is in it is temporal. On one level we know this. But the question we need to ask now is the one that follows from this truth: do we want to invest our time, our talent and our treasure in that which is passing away? The second act of the one practicing good stewardship, it seems to me then, is to make good choices, to choose to live not for ourselves and our

own needs, but for the sake and the welfare of one another, of the community. Being a good steward calls us to set limits and to live within those limits and to choose to invest in that which is eternal, in God and in our neighbors.

As people who desire to be good stewards of what God has given to us, there is really only question that each of us need to ask and to answer. *Am I being faithful to what God has called me to be and to do?* This is not a question that can be answered outside of earnest prayer or outside of the willingness to give up everything that we have planned for our lives. (repeat) Your life and my life and all that we have, including our jobs, our talents, our children and spouses, everything, none of it is ours, it all belongs to God. We will either learn this now and invest our time our talent and our treasure in that which is eternal, or we will come to understand it when the running stops in earnest.

In Jesus Name; Amen.