

Stewardship is a Way of Life

I just want you all to know I didn't volunteer for this. It took a request from Renee and I find I can't say no to her. And after the message she gave yesterday saying another good bye to Dr. Sam I think she deserves a break! It's a lot of work to put a message together every week and sometimes more and so thank you Renee for working so hard for us.

The gospel today in Mark tells the story a rich man and a poor widow. And I think one of the things it tells is of two ways of living out stewardship as a way of life.

Located in the Treasury which was in the Temple were 13 large brass receptacles for receiving money. Nine of them were for sacrifice-tribute money, money going for obligatory offerings and temple taxes, and 4 were for free will offerings. I thought that was an interesting way to keep track of the giving.

So there Jesus was, watching people as they came into this area to give. He made a point of focusing on the rich giver who made a big deal about his giving. Maybe the rich man felt he was very important and deserved lots of personal attention. I'm sure there were other rich givers who were quiet, humble givers, maybe like the rich young man who asked Jesus what he needed to do to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus also pointed out the poor widow who only had a few coins left to her name and she gave them all.

It was a very public activity. Everyone could see who gave to what receptacle and how they acted when they gave, what time of day they chose to bring their offerings. Did they arrive individually or come with friends or family, did they hang around and chat for awhile or did they come and go quickly thinking to go unnoticed? If you took time to be an observer you could make up all kinds of stories about individual lives and make all kinds of assumptions about how their lives were lived. Then you could go back home and talk about your thoughts to your family and neighbors. So much opportunity for gossip.

What an exercise it would be for us to try to imagine how that kind of a system would play out at St. Barnabas if that is how we did our offering. Well maybe not.....

So anyway back to Jesus watching this whole process. After he watched for a while he called the disciples to him and pointed out the rich man and the poor widow. Some people choose to live to make as much money as possible, have

the most influence as possible, cultivate the most power as possible thinking this was how life was to be lived. And he probably thought he was practicing good stewardship with his life.

The widow gives two mites. Jesus comments that she gave more than the rich man because she gave all her living away. Sacrificing all for God, a totally different life style than the rich man.

Now fast forward to our day and I asked myself how I give my living away as a sacrifice to God. How do I even come close. I don't come close but I like to think I practice.

I have been practicing living a spiritual life for many years and the way I live my life today has changed as I have grown spiritually.

A long time ago, I decided I needed to be a part of a spiritual community, a Christian community. I was invited to a church in Santa Cruz by a friend and after the second invitation I said yes. I was greeted by the pastor, a Japanese American surfer dude and thought ok I can do this. I found there were several other people who came to that church about the same time I did. We had similar negative experiences with organized religion in our pasts but had been lead to come back to the church. So it was a safe, loving place to sort of start over with God sharing our experiences with one another and experiencing in that church the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I started Bible studies, reading a daily devotional and meditating way back then and I continue to do those things today. I attend bible study lead by Clark on Sunday mornings. I read from Day by Day on my iPad and then read a daily devotional on line from the Society of Saint John the Evangelist. My meditation practice isn't as consistent as my reading but if I am mentally restless or unsettled it's a reminder to me that I need to sit quietly for a while and listen for the still small voice. I continue to do these because I find peace, comfort, spiritual direction, new insights from the scripture readings. I find encouragement and support to continue to commit my life to following the way of Jesus.

In my career as a nurse I was continually challenged and felt many times that Jesus was working with me, helping me solve difficult problems, leading me to people He needed me to see. I found I expected Him to show up. I expected to see miracles and I did. Maybe not earth shattering miracles but experiences that left no doubt in my mind that God is present with me always.

The pace of my life is slower in retirement but I continue to need to give to others. If I focus on myself too much I am out of balance. I volunteer at TEAM because Jesus said to feed the hungry. I participate in the life of St. Barnabas because I was led to a church long ago and need to be a part of a Christian community. I volunteer at Parker Road because supporting the education of the young grade school age kids helps them successfully adjust to adult life. Doing a small thing in hopes of a better future.

Another part of my spiritual life is taking care of my body. What a gift to have a body to live in. I decided Yoga fit me best with it's emphasis on practice-not perfection. Focusing on the mind, the body and the spirit. Acknowledging we humans are made up of all three. As a result of this decision I am a part of another loving community, lots of them Christian, committed to sharing the love we have with our community hoping for a better world.

And then there's music. It was easy to become part of the choir here and even more so because Michael wanted to sing as well. As far as flute playing goes it dawned on me a bit late that I had been given a gift in the ability to play this beautiful instrument and I should use that gift. Kind of like not keeping my light under a basket. So it has been a blessing to me. The Northwinds Band is another wonderful, talented, loving community that I have the privilege to be a part of. More practicing Christians. Bringing joy to the community to counter the negativity around us. And it keeps going- playing in church, playing with Susan and playing with my brother.

Commitment to social justice and a more healthy environment I also think of as spiritual endeavor. We are stewards of our planet and there is a lot to be done. I try to do my part in recycling, trying not to use more water than I need, turning off lights when I'm not in the room, not using pesticides. We planted a butterfly and hummingbird garden with native perennials, hoping to give the monarch butterflies a place to feed and grow. I fed honeybees this fall finding out they are hungry when most of the flowers are gone. Honeybees do a whole lot in providing us our food and they are having a hard time surviving these days.

My social justice commitment is through the LWV. I feel the best way for us to continue to live in a democracy is to exercise our right to vote. So Michael and I register new voters, at high schools, colleges, retirement communities and courthouses where new citizens are sworn in.

So that's me trying to love God and my neighbor as best as I can, believing God is all around, in everyone, in all of creation...everywhere I look. And I can't help but give back to the love that first loved me.

I've been sharing my story with you today but my story is only one story in this church. Each of you has a story and each of you has reasons you have chosen to follow in Jesus' footsteps and give back to God in gratitude.

I imagined Jesus calling his disciples to himself today like He did way back at the temple treasury. Saying to them, "Look at all my loving children at St. Barnabas". I imagine him saying to those disciples - doesn't this community remind you of the giving of the poor widow. This community of believers though they may not be rich give their lives away in love to each other, their families, their friends and community, following in My footsteps. They are good and faithful servants.

Amen