

Stewardship

There is an Old Testament legend about wealth and possessions and how misunderstanding God's purpose for them can steal a person's freedom to enjoy all the gifts of God, that were freely bestowed already in the first chapters of Genesis.

Long ago, even before the Garden of Eden, before God gave mankind dominion over all the earth, God decided to give to animals and to man the gift of freedom. There was one condition: It was to be a time of testing. If, after the testing, they learned the secret of freedom, they were to be relieved of its torture. In the course of time, all of the animals gathered before the Lord God to report.

The lion spoke on behalf of all of the beasts of the forest. "When I first knew the gift of freedom," it said, "I looked out over all the earth, with all of its wealth and possessions, and I wanted all of these things for myself. But after a while, I remembered that the Lord of the earth had given me life and food. So," the lion concluded, "I resolved to use my freedom to tell all of the beasts of the forest my discovery." Throughout the forests the lion roared, "All things come from thee, O Lord." God said, "You have learned the secret of freedom. Return to the forest!"

Then the condor came forth to report for the winged creatures of the sky. "I discovered freedom," it said, "as I soared high above the heavens and earth. All created things looked up to me in admiration. Quickly I pondered how wonderful it would be to have all

of them bow down to me in reverence and awe. Then just as suddenly I came to my senses," said the condor, "that my every flight must come to an end, and that only you, O God, remain." Thereupon I resolved to use my freedom to



herald this message to the very skies of the universe. "The Lord is God, and he alone. Let all the earth bow down before God in reverence and awe."

And the Lord God said, "You have learned the secret of freedom. Return to the skies!"

Then came forth the great blue whale as the spokesman for all the creatures of the seas. "I knew my power and my strength. I knew how wonderful it would be to soar through all of the seas, scattering all sea creatures before me in fear and terror. But, then I remembered that I am appointed to live only once, and then die forever, and that you, O Lord, rule and govern all things. After that I went forth to all of my fellow creatures and reminded them, 'All

In Matthew's Gospel, the words, "Unless you take up your cross and follow me..." are not just interesting points of contemplation; they represent a personal challenge to give of yourself.



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Whatever You Have!

Then the righteous will answer him saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you drink?"

Matthew 25:37

Often we think this means helping the poor or giving to a worthy cause. However, it simply means meeting an immediate need. When we ask God to use us, doors have a way of opening quickly. Our local church always seems to have a need for helpers in the nursery. Vacation Bible school is another area that never has too many volunteers. The church custodian tells me on a regular basis how much he appreciates the volunteer cleaning and helping hands that keep the church looking nice. Taking communion to shut-ins is another way to "feed the hungry." God isn't as concerned with our giftedness as with our availability. Any time we give of ourselves, whether it is time, money, special abilities, or just our availability, God has a marvelous way of multiplying the gift to "feed the many" and bless the giver. 

Love is faith in action. Two of the most important questions we can ask ourselves are "Whom do I love?" and "Who loves me?" As Christians, we put faith into action by extending our concern for people beyond ourselves. We show our concern for others in our actions and relationships. Is our concern for others Christ-like? Do we reach out to help people in need?



Thanksgiving

Sometimes we are inadvertently reminded of all that we have to be thankful for. My eyes stopped suddenly the other day on a sentence I read written by Allen W. Clark:

"Those who can be thankful only for prosperity are forever threatened by adversity."

To live in the Spirit of Christ endows you and me with the capacity to live thankful lives despite our circumstances. How I wish more of us really understood this.

The companionship of Christ ... whether traveling along the bright hilltops of life or through dark valleys filled with failure, sorrow, and challenge ... supports our whole outlook and approach to life. God yearns for us to find our joy, our satisfaction, our needs fulfilled, not in material things and prosperity, but in God.

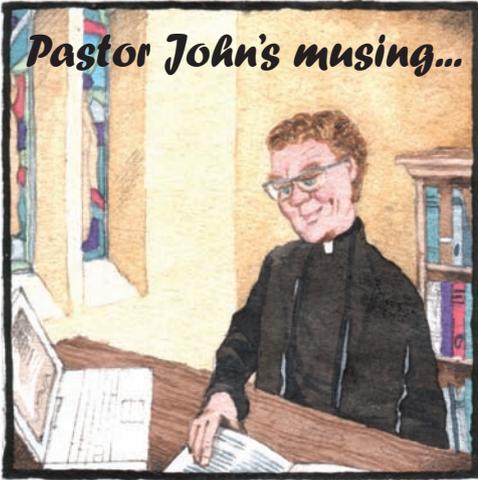
The loss of prosperity, and indeed the disappointing search for it, can ruin any deep sense of thanksgiving. "Those who can be thankful only for prosperity are forever threatened by adversity."

As Thanksgiving Day approaches, take time to think about your reasons for being thankful. How deep are they? Perhaps you will want to take this season to accept more fully God's companionship as your richest possession.

Worship God with a thankful heart!



Pastor John's musing...



“Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you have proved trustworthy in a small way, I will now put you in charge of something big.”

Matthew 25:5

A steward is a person who manages the affairs and assets of another. Joseph as Potiphar's steward (Genesis 39:1-6) was the manager of Pharaoh's business affairs.

Likewise, God has entrusted the world and all it contains to us. We are responsible, as good managers, for the manner in which we use what God has placed in our hands.

A well-managed team may not finish first, but there is real satisfaction in knowing that as a manager one has done his or her best to develop and use the talents of all the players to the best advantage of the team.

Stewardship is being a good manager of our God-given talents. Like the man in the parable, we can bury our talents and not use them, only to discover that we have lost them, or we can invest them in a life of service and see them multiply over and over again. What are our talents? Our time, our abilities, our whole life! Stewardship is using all of these things to our best advantage and to the best advantage of others ... all for the honor and glory of God from whom they came. 

Take It Off the Top

The latter part of the Book of Leviticus summarizes the financial law of ancient Israel. In the last chapter, we find this passage:

“But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the Lord, of anything that he has, whether of man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord ... All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord.”

Leviticus 27:28-30

The tithe was to be taken “off the top.” God was always to get the first ten percent of all income, of all produce. This was the way he ordained for the expenses to be covered that were incurred in building and maintaining first the Tabernacle, then the Temple, in supporting the priests and Levites, and in caring for the needy. A two-fold principle was evident, even from this early date.

First, this is God's way of paying for God's work. Of course, God doesn't “need” people's money. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine. God doesn't need anything! But, God has chosen to be dependent upon our faithfulness in this regard.

Secondly, the people were to give their ten percent joyfully and without question. The rest was theirs, but the tithe is God's. They were to keep their promises, and not try to take back what was committed to the Lord. This was part of their covenant relationship with God. 

Ask not what the church can do for you; ask what you can do for your instrument of God in shaping and inspiring other members of your church!

Do you have special skills that you could use for your church?

Whatever your talent is, share it!

WE CAN ALL FIND SOME TIME TO SHARE...



...IF WE REALLY WANT TO!

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There is an Old Testament...

strength and power are from God, and God alone shall renew your strength.’”

And the Lord God said, “You have learned the secret of freedom. Return to the seas!”

Then it was man’s turn to assemble before the Lord God to report. “I have discovered that this freedom is a very heavy, burdensome thing,” he complained. “I have used my freedom to be taken up with possessions; anxious to maintain my standing and status amongst mankind; I became stricken with fear and anxiety over the possibility of losing it all. I used my freedom to hover and hoard; to accumulate and acquire more. I have not had time to learn its secret.”

So the man returned to earth, and to this day he struggles to learn the secret of true freedom. He spends much of his time and energy, laden with anxiety, dreading its loss. In a few rare and far

apart moments of trust in the Lord, the giver of all, he comes to trust the Lord God. In those moments he offers it to God in praise and thanksgiving.

And the legend concludes: “O man, you have captured and conquered the lion, the condor, and the whale with your science and advanced technology. But you yourself have been made captive to greed, wealth, and the accumulation of things. You have lost your freedom in the very pursuit of it. What I gave you to subdue and enjoy captured you, made you its captive, and you have lost the secret of freedom. But you still have time, O man!” 

