

October 15, 2017

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

SERMON

Each year about this time we hear the word stewardship. And I'm afraid that probably I and many of my clergy brothers and sisters have done a disservice to our congregations and to the whole idea and concept of stewardship. Because we use that word over and over again at this time of the year. And we don't always use the word stewardship the rest of the year. But the truth of the matter is, stewardship is not something that is done in the fall of the year so that we can have a budget for next year. That's not what stewardship is at all.

Stewardship begins for people of faith, people either Jew or Christian, with Genesis. We are told that we were created in part to be stewards of God's creation. We have a very special part in God's creation. And God charges humanity to take care of it. God has put creation in our hands and says to us, "Treat it in a way that honors who I am. Live out your life in a way that honors the Creator. Honors the owner of all creation." Which includes you and me.

Even though the word isn't used, we really talk about stewardship throughout the year, every year. Because it's about how we live our lives as followers of God and followers of Jesus Christ. We talk about stewardship when we recognize that we are not our own. That we live, move, have our being because of the grace and love of God. And we are called to do things with our lives that brings honor and glory to the one who created us. To the one who owns us. And so, it is about every

aspect of living. It's about every aspect of being in a relationship with God and being in a relationship with one another.

Now a few years ago, I did a challenge to the congregation. I presented a challenge to do four things that represent stewardship of their lives, of our lives throughout the year. To make a commitment to do that. Does anybody remember that? A few, okay. Do you remember what they are? Now Adam was here at 8:00, he knows. I'd like to present those again briefly.

The first one was prayer. To pray daily and intentionally, to work on our relationship with God. On my relationship with God. That's what prayer is about. Sometimes we get prayer mixed up with a wish list of what we'd like God to do for us. It's about being present with God and intentionally present with God. To share who we are, where we are. Does God know that? Sure. Does God want to hear it from us? Yes. It's an opportunity for us to share the concerns of our hearts. It does two things. It makes it more real for us and intentional for us. And it presents it at the throne of God. And I said do that for twenty minutes a day.

I got a lot of feedback about that one more than any of the other three. That at first it was difficult and sometimes very repetitive but it also led many of the members of this congregation to see prayer differently. To not only speak to God but to listen for God. To do that on a daily basis and to hear and understand that God speaks to us. Not necessarily in a voice like you're hearing mine now. But with the feelings of how we are looking at life and where we are going and what we feel compelled to do in the world around us. Whether it be a part of our time at St. Jude's or with St. Jude's or whether it be part of our time when we're out working. Or with friends, or with co-workers, or with strangers and being aware of what God would have us do in relationship to them.

Often times a reminder of our own baptismal covenant of how we are to treat others. Because our relationship with God has been enhanced, has been deepened through that time of prayer.

I challenged you to come worship or to worship an hour a week. Come to a Sunday service, you got that covered. But worship is so much more than just this, although this is important. Coming together, knowing that we are not on our journey alone. Our journey with God is never alone. It is shared with all the people of God. And we are called to share it with all the people. When we come together and worship, we are reminded that this travel, this pilgrimage, this journey is not simply ours. But we have support, and encouragement around us.

We come together to give thanks to God for who we are and that we are a part of this ecclesia, this community, called the church. We come together to pray together, to lift up our concerns as a community. We come together to praise the God who has given us life. Who has redeemed life, who has given us the gift of salvation. And with that gift a charge to make a difference in creation. To make a difference in the world for God's sake. To come together and to share the sacrament. One of the few things that Jesus told his disciples to do. Eat this bread, drink this wine in remembrance of me. For as long as you eat this bread and drink this wine in remembrance of me, I am present, I will be present with you. It's a remind that you are not alone. That God is with us and we have one another.

We are challenged to intentionally set aside time to give of our time to concerns in the church and in the world. The two are not mutually exclusive. We are the church here, and we are the church in the world. And we are called to give of our time to help those in need. To be present with those who need companionship. To proclaim by word and

example the good news of God and Christ, one of the promises we make in our baptismal covenant.

Wherever your passion is, to feed the hungry. To help teach those who need to learn to read so that they can better live their lives as God's children. To visit the prisoner. All those things that Jesus told the disciples to do when he was talking about the kingdom of God. Those who will be going into the kingdom of God, you fed me when I was hungry. You gave me drink when I was thirsty. You clothed me when I was naked. You visited me when I was sick. You came to me when I was in prison. When did we do that Lord when you did that to the least of these. My brothers and sisters, you did it to me.

Our stewardship of our lives is called to do these things. And we are. As St. Jude's and individual members of St. Jude's we are performing all of these things. We need to continue that and to do it intentionally. To listen to God pushing us in a direction to give God time, our time. Time that God has given us to honor God by helping God's people.

The fourth was to give of our treasure of the blessings that we have been given. And that's what we usually think about when we think about stewardship. Here we go again. Stewardship, stewardship Sunday. Priest is going to talk about giving money to the church. Making a pledge. Yep, I'm going to do that but it's one small part. This is not stewardship. This is a stewardship campaign. This is a specific time when we say to the members of the congregation we are doing so much in our community, in our outreach. We are doing so much for one another.

We brought in a youth director who is leading our children to become more committed Christians. That are making them more active than they have been. We are having more and more opportunities for adults to get together and to share the good news. To do ministry with one

another, to encourage them to go out into the world, in their workplaces, in their homes, in their communities and to make a difference. To proclaim by example and word the good news in God and Christ. St. Jude's makes a difference in our community.

When you get home and you look at the booklet that you received today, you will see and hopefully like me you will get a greater understanding and a wonderful feeling about what we do in our community. What we do for and with one another. But the only way that this continues and the only way that this expands is if our members the ones who contribute their time and their talent, also contribute their treasure so that we can continue to be that place in this community that opens its door and opens its arms to people who are searching. Who are looking for good news. Who need to hear and understand that God loves and cares for them and that there is a place for them to come. Where they can learn to pray if they don't already. Where they can learn to worship if they don't already. Where they can learn that God's love for them is as complete as it is for anybody else.

This is that contact point for so many people. To see that presence, to know that the doors are open. To know that they can come and be a part. Where they can be fed by word and sacrament. Where they can come on a Wednesday night and get a meal and be with people who will share with them at table. Will share with them their stories, will share with them who we are as a church. To see the young people that come and are learning and getting that foundation of how God loves them and what God wants for their lives.

In teaching the confirmation class, I am enthused about what our young people know. And what they are learning, and how they want to participate. It only happens because this place is here. They have a place to come. They have people who teach, who share, who give of

their time and their talents, their gifts. And so yeah, we take a Sunday out of the church year and we say we want you to prayerfully consider making a pledge to the church.

You've already committed so much. You've committed your time. You've become members. You go out and do in the name of St. Jude's. You come and receive at St. Jude's. And we want to make sure that continues. Not only continues but grows. And the way that we do that is by giving of ourselves. Our time, our talent, and our treasure.

This week you'll receive a letter and a pledge card. I know that pledge cards scare some people. Please know and understand that if you fill out a pledge card and if for some reason it doesn't get fulfilled, we don't send mean people out to get you. We don't send enforcers to make sure that it is paid. This is between you and God. I don't know what you pledge. That's another important thing that I've learned in my 35 years. Most people don't want me to know what you pledge. That's okay. I don't want you to know what I pledge either. That's okay. I don't know. All I know is that we have a congregation here that is welcoming and warm.

It shares the gospel in many and varied ways. And I want to see that continue and I want to see that grow. And we can only do that as we make that commitment. The same commitment that we made to God in baptism, the same commitment that we made to God in confirmation. We're now asking a commitment so that the ministry of St. Jude's can grow, can expand, and can welcome all who are searching for a loving God who is searching for them.

Father Greg Hein

Transcribed by Renee' Evans