

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN

Sermon given by Dan Phillips
At Caroline Valley Community Church
14 November 2010
STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY
Matthew 25:14-27

Every year in church we do the same things. We celebrate Advent, have a special service for Easter, mention Pentecost, have a special All Saints Day, etc. And one of those annual days, occurring in most churches, is called Stewardship Sunday. Now this is a time when the pastor stands up and talks about giving to the church. Most pastors will emphasize that the giving needs to be more than just money, but money's okay too. In many churches, this day is done in recognition of the upcoming fiscal year. Financial pledges are requested so the church knows what funds it will have for the next year.

Like all our annual rituals, this one has a legitimate purpose, and is carried out with planning and forethought. There is a great deal of sensitivity and love expressed during the process. Most pastors are careful to mention those scriptural passages that relate to our resources. It is generally one of the most focused parts of our church year. And often one of the most boring!

Why are we so bored with this? It is immediate, and personal. It's practical, and very important. So why does this not capture our interest? Maybe it's because it sounds like a commercial: another attempt to gain our financial support for something. After all, there are many deserving causes in our world. We can give to world hunger (and we do) or to care for the elderly (which we also do) or to provide housing for low income families (again something we do). So maybe our church becomes just another one of those deserving yet annoying organizations that ask for our money.

Or maybe we have already decided what we are going to give the church, and feel like there is no need for this ritual request. We are going to give what we are going to give, and all this service is not necessary. So we pay little attention, feeling like this issue is already decided, and the pastor is preaching to the converted.

Again, maybe we are just so familiar with this concept of stewardship that nothing that is said seems new. It all seems so trite: words about talents, and commitment, and missions, and our need to take care of what is entrusted to us. We hear it every year. And unlike Christmas or Easter, it has little emotional value to us. So the repetition has become mind-numbing, and we just want it to stop.

If you are already asleep now, WAKE UP! I want to point out something you may not have realized in the scripture passage in Matthew. At no point do any of the servants ask for anything from the master. Instead, the master freely gives the servants his talents. We have been given much, and are expected to use it!

In 1st Corinthians, Paul says that God has given a gift to each member of the church to use in support of the church. Each of us has something to contribute to the fellowship of believers. Each of us has something we are CALLED to do for and with the church. And we need to explore this gift. Our challenge, then, for this year, is not just to contribute our time and money, but to exercise our talents. It's great that the passage in Matthew uses the word talents. To the people of Jesus' time, this meant money. But to us it means those gifts that Paul talks about.

We have a lot of talent in this church. Some can play musical instruments, others can sing, and still others can read or do the announcements. Some can pray, and some can count the money, and others can greet everyone as we enter the sanctuary. All of us have something we can do. But some of us are not doing anything. We want to say that we have no talents, no gifts, nothing to contribute.

I don't believe that! I go back to Paul's writings and find him saying that everyone can help build up the fellowship. In the Matthew passage, the implication is that the Master gave something to each of his servants. Now we don't all have the same talents, or even the same amount of talent. That is also clear in the Matthew text. Yet if you read the Matthew text carefully, you see that the one with the two talents and the one with the five talents got EXACTLY the same recognition from the Master. It was not what they were given that mattered, but what they did with what they were given. So the challenge is to find out what our talent is, and to use it. It is the use of our abilities that makes us a part of the fellowship. There is a time for each

of us to sit and listen and appreciate others, and there is a time for each one to share with the congregation.

And I believe that one of the teachings of this parable of Jesus is that the use of talent begets other talents. I think that if we use the abilities we have, we develop others! If we use our talent for singing, maybe we also learn to stand and speak in front of groups. Maybe playing an instrument will lead to writing music. What the results will be, only God knows. But I think a part of this lesson is that the use of our gifts leads to other gifts!

So I ask each member of the Caroline Valley Community Church to set this as a goal this year: to use your talents, whatever they are, in the church and for the church, believing that God will reward your faithfulness with even more ability.
Amen