

FAITH AND LOVE IN THE GIVING

Sermon for Stewardship Dedication Sunday



**"I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver."
(Maya Angelou)**

Scripture:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Psalms 90

¹Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." ⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. ⁵You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; ⁶in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. ⁷For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. ⁸You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

⁹For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. ¹⁰The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

¹¹Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. ¹²So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

¹³Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants! ¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. ¹⁵Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. ¹⁶Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. ¹⁷Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands —O prosper the work of our hands!

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



FAITH AND LOVE IN THE GIVING

Stay awake, build up one another, be children of light, put on the breastplate of faith and love. How do we interpret these commands given to the church in Thessalonica? Do they apply at all to us today?

These lectionary passages for today are linked. Psalm 90 connects with this passage in 1st Thessalonians when the Psalmist cries out, “For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed.”

Thessalonians seems to answer this cry with a reassurance. Paul reminds them that God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is an answer to the anguish in Psalm 90. Salvation involves healing and wholeness, renewal and flourishing. God doesn't give up on us and God has not given up on Church of the Roses either.

Elements in this passage apply to our role in keeping the church going forward into the future. We are asked to stay awake and not abandon our faith in Jesus and in the community that follows his way.

The church is the ecclesia, (Greek for) the community of his followers, gathering, worshipping, sharing meals, and caring for one another and the world. The church, the community that gathers in Christ's name is precious to God. As it was in the beginning, it is now and forever shall be.

HOW DO WE HELP TO PRESERVE THE CHURCH

So to honor the role we play in preserving the church, we are to:

First - Keep awake and not get lazy, not let this place become just a social club but to keep it on the

path of Jesus, teaching his way of being, healing and promoting the love and justice of God in whatever ways we are able.

Second - As we do this we are to build up one another in our efforts, be children of light and not succumb to the darkness of fear and negativity. This is only possible when we have an attitude of gratitude, and be outward focused, promoting justice for all.

Third - We are to let faith and love be our armor in the world, protecting us and guiding all we do and say.

STEWARDSHIP

So you might be wondering what all this has to do with stewardship? I'm so glad you asked!

When we hear the term stewardship, many of us think immediately of money. That season that comes around every year in a congregation's life when the church family is asked to make a financial commitment for the coming year. Stewardship is an important part of showing your faith and love for God. So, we are asking all to pledge even if it needs to be just a small amount of money, so the church can make plans to continue Christ's ministry here in this section of Santa Rosa and beyond. All pledges are kept confidential.

And this year we made it clear on the pledge cards that Stewardship is more than money. Stewardship is how we live out our calling as followers of Christ. Stewardship is showing the world the love of God in yourself. So we added on the pledge cards the ways people serve as an example of giving.

BEAUTIFUL ART

The art on the bulletin cover was given to us as a gift to the church from a young man who was befriended by Jack MacLean many years ago. David struggles with his health. But creating drawings like this soothes his soul and helps him feel peaceful. Helping people share their gifts and talents is an important part of our ministry here.

Yet I know some people dread the stewardship message every year. There are times when many of us are filled with self-doubt, fear, and insecurity. And we tell ourselves, "I can't do it. I don't have the money or the time or the talent to give more to the church!"

Despite having those same feelings at times, in my family we were still expected to tithe because it was our chance to tangibly demonstrate our faith in God. I grew up with a tithing mother who learned how to tithe from her mother. My grandmother was a teacher raising three little girls on her own. But she always gave ten per cent of her meager income from teaching, along with her time and talents to the church.

GRANDMA'S STEWARDSHIP LETTER

Recently I discovered a precious article written by my Grandma Thaxton about stewardship that she wrote for her First Methodist Church newsletter in Nebraska. Her words ring as true today as they did in 1973.

The title of her article was, "*The Results of Positive Giving.*"

She wrote: "Positive giving is the result of positive thinking and a demonstration of putting God first in our lives. When we have Christ's spirit within us, we have compassion and really care about the needs of other people. It is through the church and God's people that most of these needs are met. This takes money, more these days than ever before.

**"What is the result of Positive Giving?
The results are two-fold:
the good our giving will do for others
and the benefit to ourselves
"Giving for God's work is a form of worship.
It is a recognition that everything
comes from God and we are only
giving back a small percentage
for all the blessings we have received."**

Then she concluded with: "Through our local church and the broader church we can do wonderful work in alleviating human misery the world over."

Obviously my grandma knew what it meant to be a missional church. One that stays awake to the needs of the community and world.

STEWARDSHIP AND CHURCH FINANCE

But my question for Church of the Roses is, "How do *WE* make an impact on our community that is long lasting?" To have a big lasting impact on the community we need to be willing to support our church financially for the long term and not just for the short term. We need to be a financially healthy church.

Lately I have been reading articles about stewardship and church finance. I discovered there are five signposts that identify a financially healthy congregation.

The first signpost is an awareness that all giving is in response to God's goodness and generosity. Keep awake to God's blessings.

The second signpost of a financially healthy church is one that discusses money in the context of the sacredness of worship. The offering time is an important sacred moment in worship.

Third, a church that talks about money openly and candidly in all aspects of the church's life, realizing that how we use our money says a great deal about our faith, values and priorities. This links directly to the next signpost.

The fourth sign of a financially healthy church is a church that engages in mission beyond its own doors. One of the reasons the Crystal Cathedral went into bankruptcy is their donors realized that the Schuller family was more focused on themselves and their TV ministry and not enough on outreach.

And the fifth and last sign of a healthy church is one that plans long-range for its program and ministry objectives, faithfully planning for a long term future. Dream big for Church of the Roses!

The good news is that we can easily be a financially healthy church not because we are so rich, but because God's grace and your faith make it possible. Your participation is so very important to help us achieve our goal of one-hundred per cent participation in pledging. We want to help liberate your souls! As Maya Angelou said, "Giving liberates the soul of the giver." (See her quote on the front of the bulletin.)

FAITH GIVING

And “Faith Giving” is joyfully trusting that you will not be judged or compared to others. It is defined by Jesus in Luke 6 when he said, ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’

And what you get back is more than just a good feeling. New research on generosity has been compiled in a book entitled *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*, by Stephen Post.

He says, “Inspiring new research from a fifty-year study showed that people who were generous during their high school years have better physical and mental health throughout their lives. Other studies show that older people who give live longer than those who don’t. Helping others has been shown to bring health benefits to those with chronic illness, including HIV, multiple sclerosis, and heart problems. And studies show that people of all ages who help others on a regular basis, even in small ways, feel happiest.”

OUR ABILITY TO DO GOD’S WORK

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale once said that God has placed in your personality all the ability you need to do God’s work in the world. You have only to believe in yourself, and the strength within you will be released.

Your strength here at Church of the Roses is being released. In this first year here, it has been a blessing for me to witness how God’s amazing grace is at work through your dedication.

The eighteen new members and six baptisms and two new staff people and growing choir are all evidence of an even brighter outlook for our future. God’s grace is clearly affirming that this church is meant to bloom once again. Thanks be to God for your commitment, faith and love!

(As we sing our next hymn please bring your pledge envelopes forward if you are able and place them in the baskets. If you handed yours in early you may still bring a blank envelope symbolizing your support.)

Benediction: We are being renewed and ready to flourish here at Church of the Roses because we trust the words of 2nd Corinthians 9 that says, "God is able to make all grace abound in you so that in all things at all times having all that you need you will abound in every good work."

Thank you for continuing to show your faith and love through giving your tithes and yourselves for the future of this blessed church.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and forever more. Amen



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