

October 25, 2015

“Because We Have Received So Much...”

I Thessalonians 5:16-18, Luke 12:42-48

When you hear the word, “Stewardship,” what comes to your mind?

Last Sunday, which was a laity Sunday, Dr. Harder preached on “Stewardship” and Henry from the 12 Step Program that meets at our church, shared his testimony about how his life was changed by coming to those meetings. He then thanked us for opening up our church to their programs. Thus we kicked off our three week, so called “Stewardship” season, which will culminate on November 8, when we give in our commitment sheets for 2016 during our offering. Our commitment includes not only financial resources but prayer, time and talents as well. As I made an announcement, you will receive, I hope most of you will receive, a Stewardship package sometime this week.

When I first heard the word, stewardship, it didn’t click with me; and I didn’t really understand what it meant. Then I came to learn that it was a term often used during the church’s financial campaign for the coming year. (pause) Now I have gained a greater appreciation for the word and what it means.

First, to me it means “a sense of responsibility.” God has given me so much in many ways. My response to it is to share, to give and to serve. God has given me enough financially. I am not rich as you can imagine, but I have enough; enough food to eat and enough clothes to wear. I have a loving family here and in Japan, and good friends, here and over there. God gave me some talents and gifts which I can use in my work. I am blessed with my health ... so far.

So what is my responsibility -- my response to all that has been given to me? It is to serve God more and to serve people more. Out of my gratitude for what God has given me comes a sense of responsibility to give, to share and to serve. A sense of responsibility to be a good steward of the gifts God has provided.

In the parable of a servant or a steward we heard a short time ago, Jesus said, “Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given.” (12:48)

Last week, Henry, who called himself “a recovering addict,” told us how warmly he had been welcomed into the fellowship of the 12 Step Program, which is held in the basement of this church, which we call the “community room.” Coming to the 12 Step program here was the turning point in his life. Now he sponsors other people who attend the program; who are at where he was in the past. With his gratitude and a sense of responsibility, he serves -- serves as a sponsor to those who have been lost. “It is doing me good too,” he says, “to serve as a sponsor.”

What “stewardship” means to me secondly is our responsibility to keep this planet green, clean and sustainable for future generations of children, youth and adults. Stewardship requires us to do

our best or to take at least little baby steps toward keeping this planet safe from damaging climate changes which cause record-breaking droughts, flood, wild fires, tornadoes and hurricanes. Stewardship leads us to make changes in the way we live; to altar our lifestyle.

One small change I am making in my life is my buying habit. I have noticed lately that I am purchasing a quality product, which might be a little costly but lasts longer, so that I don't need to keep buying items, which may be less expensive but don't last as long or serve as well. Also, I am a bit more careful about buying new things and before I buy something, I ask myself, "How often will I use it?" - I avoid accumulating unnecessary "stuff." This is a small but good change of habit, a life style change.

The other side of the "stewardship" coin is gratitude. We would like to be good stewards of what we have received because we are grateful and thankful for it--whether it is material gifts, spiritual gifts, talents, persons or the gift of the planet.

We as a congregation, have much to be thankful for. We have a beautiful, well maintained campus (admittedly, we will always have some places in need of repairs and upgrades!); we have a rich history; people with good hearts (even though we may not agree with each other all the time on certain issues); a caring and loving attitude toward one another; many gifts and talents among us; and financially, we have almost enough to pay our bills and staff salaries -although we always do seem to experience a "crunch time". We are, surely, financially more sound than a couple of years ago.

There is an expression, "a year around stewardship." Stewardship **IS** year-around. Being thankful to God for what we have or taking seriously the stewardship responsibility for God's gifts does not (or should not) need to be just a few weeks in fall when we celebrate Thanksgiving and have a stewardship campaign for the next year. 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18 says, "Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, **always be thankful**, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

Though it is hard to be always thankful, we **can** take time to highlight our gratitude and count our blessings once again this fall and in this stewardship season.

At the last Church Council meeting, we discussed expressing our gratitude to those who serve in our church year after year, and to those who served faithfully for many years in the past. We thought we might be falling short when it comes to expressing or showing our appreciation to one another. So let's take the next few minutes for all of us to stand up and go to the person or persons you would like to say "Thank you" to for his or her service to the ministries of this congregation. I am sure you can find people to thank all around you.

(After going around and thanking people, a prayer will be offered.)

O God, thank you for the many blessings you have given us. This morning, we would like to especially thank you for the faithful services offered to the ministries of this congregation. Bless each servant of yours with your grace. In the name of Jesus, who served us. Amen.