

Our Life Together: Gifts & Service  
Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 25:14-30  
November 14, 2010

Last week we began our Stewardship sermon series by considering the vows taken when you join the church to support the work of the church with your prayers and presence. This week we are continuing a look at this covenant as we think about the vows to support Sunrise with our gifts and our service.

I want to begin by offering a basis on top of which to build our understanding of our stewardship of gifts and service. When we look back into the first chapters of Genesis, we find God giving man *dominion* over creation. The Hebrew word that we translate as *dominion* is *radah*, which means *to rule over*. We are, in fact, placed in a position to rule over the rest of creation, but there is no implication in the word as to the characteristic of that rule. If we are to pattern ourselves after Christ, then our method of reigning over the rest of creation should be permeated with a Christ-like influence.

Christ stands in two roles – kingly and priestly. In other words, in his reigning over all of us, his *kingly* reign is characterized by his *priestly* mediation of God’s presence. He conveys who God is to each of us by how he reigns. In the same way, you and I mediate the presence of Christ to creation around us – whether that creation is flora and fauna or humanity.

As we formulate and understanding of what it means to be good stewards of our gifts and service, we need to keep in mind that our stewardship needs to be characterized by our priestly mediation of Christ to those around us.

In thinking about the stewardship of gifts, I wanted to lift up the story of the three servants. You’ve already heard the story in the scripture reading – each person was given gifts from the Master and entrusted to make good use of them for the benefit of the Master. Those who did were entrusted with more; those who did not use their gifts for the benefit of the master had them taken away.

What gifts do we have that have come from God? Each person is given spiritual gifts. When you receive your Stewardship packet in the mail, one of the pages asks you to find out what your spiritual gifts are. (There are instructions on the sheet.) Each person is gifted by God with a talent, passion, or inclination that is to be used for the building up of the Kingdom of God. When you and I choose not to exercise our spiritual gifts, the church is poorer for it – in keeping with our theme...the piece of the puzzle that represents your gifts will be missing from the picture. However, when we choose to be obedient and put our spiritual gifts to use, we are mediating the presence of Christ to fellow church members and to everyone we meet.

We are also given material gifts. Jesus thought that it was so important that we understand how to relate to material things, like money, that he spoke about it more than any other subject. Jesus knew that holding money in too high a regard was a temptation for people. They would forget that it wasn't really theirs – they would forget that it was, in fact, something that belonged to God, and they were only managing it.

As one author recognized the struggle people have with money he said the following:

“...that is why we should give money. Because it is only in this struggle that we can prove that we are not attached to money. In the struggle we learn to see what is needed and what is not needed. In the struggle we become more of what God wants us to become. And the person that God wants us to become maybe doesn't have a Pottery Barn rug.”

God instructs us in Scripture to return to Him the first tenth of what has been entrusted to us – this is our tithe. As we give, we mediate the real presence of Christ to those to whom we give.

This also happens when we serve. The passage that I chose from Romans to illustrate service doesn't directly tell the story of one who is engaging in an act of service; instead, it illustrates what our service should look like if we are truly serving as one in the priestly role.

Listen again to Paul's instructions and think about whether your acts of service on behalf of Christ ...done inside and outside the church...are done with the heart described in the passage.

*Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. ... Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

*Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!*

*Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*

*"If your enemies are hungry, feed them.*

*If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. (Romans 12:9-20)*

If we are to honor God with our discipleship, then we must allow the Lord to fully direct our lives. It is my prayer for each of us that we would truly and earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to cause us to die to our own wills and to make God's will our only basis for what we do.

Friends, we covenant together to support Christ's church here at Sunrise with our gifts and our service. May God bless us as we encourage one another toward faith and good works...all to the glory of God.