

Sermon, Nov. 11, 2007, 25 Pentecost, Proper 28, Yr C
Stewardship Sunday

Calvary Episcopal Church, Underhill, VT

Readings:

Isaiah 65:17-25

Canticle 9 (Isaiah 12:2-6)

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

While some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus gives them the bad news: the temple will be “thrown down,” people claiming to know me will try to lead you off course, nations will war against one another, earthquakes, famines and plagues, signs from heavens will bear down on you; and before all that occurs you will be arrested and persecuted because you followed me. Oh, and one more thing, your families will betray you and put some of you to death, you’ll be hated because of me. But don’t worry he says, “*this will give you an opportunity to testify,*” speak the facts; and in spite of all this “*not a hair on your head will perish.....endure these things and you will gain your souls.*” (Luke 21:5-19).

A simple, “*yes, I agree, the temple is very beautiful,*” is most likely the reply the disciples were expecting to hear from Jesus, but things were often not that simple with him. Jesus has stated the facts, the temple was indeed destroyed, (for the third time), and all the rest of his testimony here in the 21st Chapter of Luke has happened, many times over in the history of our world thus far. Jesus knew what the early disciples and we would be “up against.” It is no wonder he said, “*love one another,*” he knew we were going to need each other, to care for each other. He prayed that we would be able to endure; *keep our faithful reliance on God to preserve life,* and thereby *increase* our spirit (v. 19). It’s another way of saying: *keep your faith* in spite of all the tough times, “*lift up your hearts!*”

God created life and set it all free on this planet to grow. God planted the first human in the garden to till it and keep it and planned *first off* that we would be the *stewards* of the land and water. (A steward is a person employed to manage another’s property, usually a large estate). In our case the estate is earth. We are the persons engaged in the work of managing God’s earth at this point in time and it’s a big job, so fortunately each of us are put in charge of only a small amount where we can best utilize our gifts

and talents in our acts of *stewardship*. By now you may realize where I'm headed with this sermon: it is stewardship Sunday at Calvary.

The lectionary readings for today fit nicely into the theme of stewardship. Isaiah speaks of God's gift of a new earth, of joy peace and tranquility for the people. They will enjoy long life and the fruits of their labors....life preserved, spirits enriched through caring and giving acts; *stewardship*. Canticle 9 encourages us to give thanks, to be of good cheer, for God has done and will continue to do great things; we should "make God's deeds known among the peoples," *stewardship in action*. Paul encourages us to "not be weary (tired or disillusioned) in doing what is right" (2 Thessalonians 3:13), to be *determined stewards*. And Jesus warns us at this point in Luke's writing that *bearing the responsibility of discipleship and stewardship will not be without risk*. It is not for the faint of heart.

The sharing of one's precious time, desirable talent, and financial resources is paramount to living well in community. Sharing is how we do God's will, its one way that we *love one another*. You hear me speak often of our task of doing God's will on earth; we pray for it, yet often forget we also have to actually do it. As our collect prayer for today (proper 28) prays: "*Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.....*God provided holy scripture for us, but at our hand. Somebody had to actually write it down. Thank God they did! Others, over the centuries, became the stewards of the Word interpreting it in to every spoken language (that work continues) preserving it, sharing it, managing it.

We are the graced and special stewards of Calvary Episcopal Church and her communities at this point in history. But, "its not all about us." Stewardship is as much about the future as it is the present. Along with our charge and duty of managing her estate, (this fine and marvelous building and land), we ought to offer these things to our surrounding communities as well: transforming love, peace, unconditional affection, inclusive unity, friendship, and hope.

These are the gifts that a church family has and gives, even if the building does fall down. They are what makes a house of worship a living and beautiful memorial to God's stewards. If we share all we can we will encourage others to do the same, and nothing of our estate will perish.