

CCUM - Can you do as I do?
Stewardship Pledge Dedication
25 Oct 2015

Mark 10:35_45 Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷ They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory."

³⁸ Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! [Can you do what I do?] Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?"

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. ⁴³ But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. ⁴⁴ Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, ⁴⁵ for the Human One[a] didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Mary Ann Brussat shares an illustration of stewardship -

“After nearly eighteen years of uninterrupted service, our freezer one day failed to cool its contents (what a mess). A serviceman made the repair and then asked to use our vacuum cleaner, explaining that a key part of the freezer had overheated because of all the dust and cat fur under it. Fred and I nodded,. Pulling the freezer out of its built in closet was not part of our [usual] cleaning routine.

Could you vacuum under the refrigerator too?” I asked.

Later, coming to sign the service receipt, we were greeted with this news: “Your refrigerator breathed a huge sigh of relief when I vacuumed.”

“You talk to machines?”

“Talk and listen; in my line of work, you have to.”

Stewardship is careful attention to each thing, to the details.... This plant need a little water. This wood will burn with a smoky fire.. I need to clear it from possible harm. This child needs a new pair of shoes. This woman needs assistance to finish her schooling.

Stewardship is about Noticing... paying attention, giving respect - re-spect = looking again. As good stewards, we are asked to notice what is right under our nose, at our fingertips, and attend to it... according to the needs.

We are going to dedicate our pledges today, and of course, the financial gifts we give are very important to help us be able to do the work we do here, and offer the service we know is important. But, these monetary gifts are also a symbol of so much more. As a faith community, we are also promising to offer our prayers, our presence, [our gifts,] our service and our witness.

Jesus asks, "Can you do what I do?" to which the disciples said, "We can."
But did they really understand what they were saying?

Jesus was willing to daily go above and beyond. We have the impression from scripture that there were often very long days of being of service to the needs of others - teaching, preaching, healing, loving.... listening and responding to people's needs.

Presence is about being here. But are we committing to being present at Sunday worship alone? Of course not. Promising our presence isn't only about being checked off the list as here. It's a way of living and interacting with others. Maxine Dennis describes what true presence looks and feels like -

Cashiering in a supermarket may not seem like a very rewarding position to most, but to me it is.

You see, I feel that my job consist of a lot more than ringing up orders, taking people's money, and bagging their groceries. The most important part of my job is not the obvious. Rather it's the manner in which I present myself to others that will determine whether my customers will leave the store feeling better or worse because of their brief encounter with me. For by doing my job well, I know I have a chance to do God's work too.

Because of this, I try to make each of my customers feel special. While I'm serving them, they become the most important people in my life.

This is true presence.... being fully there for someone, listening and attending to their needs. Presence is also about being present to our own lives. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in all those things we need to do that we forget to stop and notice. How is our presence reflected in our

relationships here at Christ Church and beyond.

As we consider service, Jack Kornfield describes a need at our very core for being of service.

We all have, (he says) without exception, a very deep longing to give =- to give to the earth, to give to others, to give to the [community], to work, to love, to care for this earth. That's true for every human being. And even those who don't find it [easily], because it has been squashed or somehow suppressed in some brutal way in their life. [This longing to give and be of service] is there to be discovered. We all long for that.

The desire to give.... to help others takes many forms. John Wesley took this very seriously ... service, caring for those for others, especially those less fortunate was one of the spiritual disciplines that he lived every day.

Macrina Wiederkehr tells a tender story of service

One special moment of beauty that stands out in my mind I experienced at a bus station... I witnessed a little girl helping her brother get a drink at the water fountain. Attempting to lift to the proper height turned out to be impossible. I was just at the point of giving them some assistance when quick as lightning she darted over to a shoeshine man, pointed at the footstool he wasn't using, dragged it to the water fountain, and very gently lifted up her thirsty brother. It all happened so fast and it was so simple, yet it turned out to be a moment of beauty that became a prayer for me... Perhaps what touched me most was her readiness to seek out a way to take care of the need without waiting to be rescued. It was a moment of beauty: a small child with a single heart.

We promise to be in prayer together.... and alone. Fred Brussat illustrates how important touch can be and how touch can serve as prayer, even when no words are said.

When I was in seminary, I did a summer internship. One day I heard the loud crashing sound of an automobile accident on the highway in front of the [church]. I ran to the scene and found a badly injured man bleeding profusely from the head. He was in a dazed condition, and kept trying to get up. Instead of offering prayers, I knelt and embraced him, encouraging him in his confusion to be still and wait for help.

Later, I was criticized by my superior who said my job was not to touch dying or injured people,, but to simply minister with prayers and words of consolation. He said that if I were ever in a situation like this again, the best course was to keep my hands off the person. I could be sued by the victim for further injuring him.

Despite this minister's advice, I continued to use touch as a form of prayer in my ministry. Two weeks later at a hospital where a woman had died, I gathered her four family members into something akin to a football team huddle. They later told me that this spontaneous gesture was a healing moment in their grieving process, and had spoken to them more deeply than any words I could have offered. The huddle enabled them to literally embody their support and love for each other.

Prayer takes many forms - a quiet time to sit and reflect, moments of wonder in nature, bringing a person into our minds and asking for them to

find peace and comfort. Prayer can also be in the form of a song, or special music. When we are fully present to another, we are holding them with love and acceptance. Our service to another can “be a moment of beauty that can come a prayer.” We promise to be in prayer with and for others. When we are intentional about this, it is like we are doing what Paul suggests, Praying without ceasing. Our life becomes a prayer.

We witness in countless ways as these stories illustrate. Those of us who have been blessed with learning about, and knowing Jesus, are guided by his ministry of love. “Can you do what I do?” We do so whenever we do for the least of these. And church is a place where we learn together, pray together, support each other, and are moved and encouraged to serve each other here... and beyond these walls.

Today we also acknowledge the power of baptism. We are blessed children of God. All of us special. All of us loved. All of us with gifts to share in all the forms these take. The water of life.... Jesus said that we enter the kingdom of God “born of water and the Spirit.”

Today, we are especially grateful for all those ways we commit to being in ministry together, through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

Will you please join me in singing, “Here I am, Lord” as we move into our time of dedication and re-commitment.

** stories from **Spiritual Literacy - Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life** by **Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat**

For many of us, our baptism was a blessing that occurred in infancy or early childhood. As infants our parents and the church promise to love and care for this child.... really to be good stewards for this child's life.... offering our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. For some of us, we reached a time when we asked to be baptized. As older teens or adults, baptism then is a time to say "Yes" to God, to reaffirm our faith.

Whatever your experience with baptism, today we are going to have a time of re-commitment. As you bring your pledges and offerings forward, there are bowls of water.... precious water. If you wish, you are encouraged to dip your hands in the water, to feel the cool water in your hands and if you wish, to touch your own head, as you affirm your connection here at Christ Church. This is a time to thank God for your gifts as you give back.

Carl will play for us as we dedicate our pledges, our offerings and ourselves.... as we say "Yes" to God.