

Count your blessings

Matthew 25:14-30

November 13, 2011

We are stewards of God's good gifts. We have been entrusted with ... everything, with the full measure of all the good things God has to give, material and spiritual. We have been given the power to use or to misuse, to nurture or to neglect, to bless or to curse.

We are stewards of the mercy of God. God has shown us mercy and we put the mercy shown us to good use when we show mercy. God's heart is inclined toward mercy, and we show to whom we belong when our hearts are inclined toward mercy. There is probably no more distinctive mark of the people of God than mercy. Where there is mercy, there God is. Where there is no mercy, God is not there.

We are stewards of the family of faith, of this family of faith. God has brought us together and given us to each other and made us a family. So value this family! Take care of this family! Help me be and do what God has called me to be and do, as I help you be and do what God called you to be and do! And be ready and eager to extend the same kind of welcome you have received to the next visitor, the next inquirer, the next stranger who comes into our midst.

We are stewards of the Lord's table. The Lord Jesus invites us in, to eat and drink with him, to eat and drink ... him, which is to say, he invites us all the way in, into a relationship of unmatched intimacy. We are good stewards of the Lord's table, Christ's table, when we come to the table gladly and gratefully, and when we welcome any and all who want to join us there.

We are stewards of our talents. God has made us what we are, to bring God delight and to serve a purpose, God's purpose. God has made me somebody, God has made you somebody, somebodies who have something we can do to bring help to each other and glory to God.

We are stewards of justice. We act as God's agents, builders of God's kingdom, by defending undefended people, by befriending lonely people, by bringing food to hungry people and a drink of water to thirsty people, by setting free oppressed people, and by advocating -- speaking passionately and acting tirelessly -- on behalf of poor people.

We are stewards of our resources. What we have, all we have, is ours to use ... to bring blessing, just as God brings blessing, to be generous, just as God is generous, to make shalom, just as God makes shalom.

We are stewards of God's good gifts. What is the worst thing, the very worst thing, you can do with God's good gifts? Sit on them! Bury them in the ground! Let them sit unappreciated and unused. That's what the third servant in Jesus' parable did with his master's money: nothing! He did absolutely nothing with it. He buried it in the ground. God's gifts are meant to be used, to be put to good use, just as the first two servants did. It's a well-known story with an obvious lesson, but I want to point out as well several less obvious implications of Jesus' parable.

First of all, tell me this: to whom do the gold coins -- all that money -- belong? It's not so clear, is it?

It was very clear to the third servant, the one who was given a thousand coins. He knew it was his master's money and he trembled at the thought of doing anything to put himself at risk of losing it. Here! Here's your money back. Count it. It's all there.

The master gives some of his money too to the first two servants and they put it to use making him more money. But it seems that when he returns, the master doesn't take the money back, but leaves it with them ... to manage, to use, to have. And the money he takes back from the servant who buried it, he gives to the servant who now has ten thousand gold coins, no, make that eleven thousand, gold coins!

In my mind, the point for faithful stewardship is this: we make a mistake, a serious mistake, when we make a distinction between what is ours and what is God's. It is all God's, of course! But it is all ours, too! Ours to have and to manage and to use. God has shared all of his wealth with us -- with us! -- not so we can claim exclusive ownership, but so we may enjoy it and be blessed by it and bless each other with it. When I think about giving in terms of what I might be prepared to give to God out of what I have, I've got it all wrong!

The second thing ... motive. What is our motive for faithful stewardship?

Again, the motive, the driving force, behind the third servant's actions, is abundantly clear. The third servant is driven by fear. He is terrified, terrified of the master he perceives as hard and cruel and ruthless. He carefully, so carefully, protects all of what the master has entrusted with him, hoping in that way not to get on his master's bad side.

But he was wrong, horribly wrong, both about what his master expected of him and about the character of his master. His master is generous and gracious, generously sharing his wealth and graciously inviting his servants into his own household: "Come on in and share my happiness!"

What is the motive of those who do receive the master's blessing, who do prove good stewards of their master's wealth? That's just it. There is no discernable motive! They just do it!

Faithful stewardship doesn't need a motive. I don't need to convince you, Sara and Erin and Pete don't need to convince you, that there is some good reason, some worthy motive, for making a generous pledge this year. It's just what we do! It's just what faithful stewards do -- day by day, year by year, generation by generation.

And the third thing ... the counting.

"Count your blessings" is the theme chosen by the United Church of Christ national office for this year's stewardship campaign and the theme adopted by our own stewardship committee: "Count your blessings."

But when you do count, how many are there? Three hundred and seventy-two? Four hundred and ninety-six? And if I can count four hundred and ninety-six and you can only count three hundred and seventy-two, does that mean that I am more blessed than you?

Which of the servants in Jesus' parable was most blessed? The one who was given five thousand coins and made five thousand more? No, no, no! The amount doesn't matter. They were each given according to their abilities. But the blessing they each received -- or in the case of the third servant, could have received -- was the same: "Come on in and share my happiness!"

We are each gifted differently, but blessed the same. When you count your blessings, there is really only one right answer: one! And the one blessing, the one extraordinary blessing that is ours, is the privilege of being invited in, of being invited in to share the Lord's joy!

Count your blessings? Here it is: the joy of being in God's presence, the joy of being a part of what God is doing, the joy of being good and faithful stewards of all God's good gifts.

How would you describe this joy? How has God blessed you? How do you experience God's presence? What motivates you to share your time and your talent and your treasure as a faithful steward of God's good gifts?

We asked you! Erin Brock and Sara Lynch filmed some of you at work sharing your gifts, and Connie Jo Peirce interviewed a number of you using those three questions. Greg Holt taped several members of his Parabola troupe as Connie interviewed them, and I asked the same three questions of our church staff.

Then I took all the footage, edited it and put it together into a ten minute video and this is what we came up with. This is your witness to the way of faithful stewardship!

[count your blessings](#)