

The Rev. Joan M. Kilian

Trinity Episcopal Church

Exodus 32: 7 – 14  
1 Timothy 1: 12 – 17

Psalm 51: 1 – 11  
Luke 15: 1 – 10

-----

Today, we begin our Fall Stewardship program. Our theme for this year is “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” You’ll hear more about that in just a minute, but because we’re doing things a little differently this year, I want us to try something. We’re changing the words – same tune, different words – that we sing during the presentation of the gifts, the Offertory at the second service (adding to 8:15). So look in your bulletins and let’s try it:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Circling through earth so all may grow  
Vanquishing fear so all may give  
Widening grace so all may live*

Exercise of giving away resources (Eric Law, *Holy Currencies*, p. 16/17); I wonder...; I notice...

A couple of Sundays ago, I shared the story of the Rev. Eric Law’s growing up in a Chinese-American household where there was, not much material wealth, but where there were always many other blessings. The family was really good at recycling the blessings they had, especially around their dinner table, not only with immediate family but with others in the community who gathered around their table every night. His family lived into a spirituality of abundance. Law gives a number of other examples in his book as well about how his family, through their business and their involvement in their community, continually kept recycling the blessings, like water flowing. He talks about what happens when water is static or stagnant: it becomes a breeding ground for pests and other unhealthy organisms. Water, to bring life, must always be flowing, recycling, or Jesus might say be ‘living water.’ The same is true with all of our blessings.

(Premise of being both missional and sustainable.) Law names six blessings that form a cycle that enables God’s grace and mercy and love to flow through us and through our communities: Relationship, Truth, Wellness, Money, Time & Place and Gracious Leadership. All six of them need to be present and at work for an organization or a congregation to thrive and flourish and not be stagnant. All six are important to ensure that we are both missional and sustainable. As we go through our Fall Stewardship Program this year, we’ll be working on naming and putting those blessings into play.

Today, we’ve had the experience of sharing our resources in a ‘virtual’ kind of way. And we’re asking you to keep your experience in mind as we pledge our Time, Talent and Treasure this year. We have our new Director of Children’s and Youth Ministries on board, Josh. Because we have said that our young people matter, a lot of you provided gracious leadership and stepped up to the plate earlier this year to make that happen.

Growing our ministry to our children and youth is exercising our currency of relationship: deepening our connections and involvement with one another here at Trinity. It’s also being missional: reaching out to connect with others who may not be as active in the church, and those who are outside of our congregation who may be looking for a way to bring God more deeply into their family life. It’s also being sustainable in another sense – finding a way to share our experiences of God and our faith tradition with the next generation.

Now, we need to ensure that we are also sustainable. That's where your thoughtful and prayerful stewardship comes in. We need to keep funding this position so that we have continuity in our ministry to our young people. Our budget for 2016 started out at about \$233K. Then, when we realized we needed a person to work with our children and youth, we went up to about a \$240K budget. (Explain the pie chart of what ministries are funded by our budget.) With the other normal increases, and with funding this position, we're looking at an additional increase of approximately \$15K for the 2017 budget of about \$255K. Last year, we had 70 pledging units. If we divide the total increase of (7 + 15) \$22K by the number of pledging households, it comes to an average increase of \$26 per month per household. If we add in those of you who give regularly but don't actually pledge, that's another ten households, which lowers the average increase to \$23 per household. That's roughly the cost of one dinner out per month, or one caramel-mocha-latte-grande coffee per week, or less than \$1 per day. Can everyone do that? No. But some of us can. And some of us can do even more. So if you haven't considered pledging before (can always change it), please do. Whether you pledge *or* give to plate, we ask you to consider increasing your financial pledge to help us be both missional and sustainable. We also ask that you prayerfully consider what other blessings you desire to share with this community in the form of your time and your talent, your gifts. (T, T & T pledge, cue from GPB to get it in as soon as possible)

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells two parables, both about lost things. The first is about the shepherd who discovers that one out of the hundred sheep in the flock is missing. Jesus asks the crowd, and particularly the Pharisees and scribes who are grumbling and mumbling about him, "Which one of you would not leave the 99 to go in search of that one and keep at it until the lost sheep is found?" Really, Jesus? We're going to leave 99 sheep alone in the field, unattended, while we go off and search for just that one? Not really very likely, Jesus. The other 99 will be unprotected from wolves, thieves, snakes and falling off cliffs. If that lone sheep is not easily spotted on the fringes of the grazing area, we're going to cut our losses. That's just good business, Jesus.

"Really?" asks Jesus, perhaps with raised eyebrows. "Seriously?" Because what may be good business by the world's accounting is upside down from God's economy. In God's economy, *everybody*, *everything* matters. God isn't about prudence (in the sense of caution) or 'good business.' God is about prodigality – extravagant, self-giving, risk-taking, leap-of-faith taking, kind of love. Overflowing abundance kind of love. Love that only multiplies and never divides when spread between more and more people. To a rational, bottom-line, intellectual, zero-sum (that one about if you get some, then I must be getting less) point of view, tracking down that one sheep makes no sense at all. But in God's perspective, it makes all the sense, all the difference, in the world to that one poor, little, lost sheep. It makes all the difference in heaven and earth to God.

So as we prayerfully and thoughtfully consider pledging our resources of time and place, money and gifts, may we come to see our lives from a spirituality of abundance and a desire to keep those blessings flowing. May we come to a deeper awareness of what it takes for us as a congregation to be both missional and sustainable. And may we remember to praise God from whom *all* blessings flow. +