

The Road Less Traveled – October 20, 2017

This Sunday we will kick off a new series in worship called *Rooted in Passion*. This five-week series will serve as the backdrop for a discussion of stewardship in the church. Now I know what you are thinking. *Stewardship! Ugh! Just be honest and tell me you want me to give more money.*

I say I know what you are thinking because I used to think the same way. I dreaded the annual stewardship campaign when I was sitting in the pews. I found it manipulative and insulting and avoided those sermons when I could. Even when I first became a pastor, I considered the annual stewardship drive as a necessary evil, something we had to do to make sure the church could continue to function. Little if any of the process felt like ministry to me.

But as my faith has deepened and matured, so has my understanding of stewardship. So stick with me here. There is a financial reality to being a church. For all of the sacred things we are part of, we are still an earthly institution. In addition to funding the various ministry initiatives to which we are called, we also have to pay the mortgage, the light bill and salaries. It would be naïve of me to suggest that money doesn't matter. It does.

But that's not stewardship. We could charge dues of all of our members and ensure that everything we want to do gets funded, but that is not stewardship. And if we confine our discussion to money – as often happens this time of year – that's not stewardship either. Stewardship is about how we as individual followers of Jesus use our resources for the advancement of God's Kingdom. It's how we use that with which we have been blessed to be a blessing to others. It's about how we offer all of our gifts to God, trusting that in God's hands those gifts become something altogether holy.

Stewardship ultimately isn't about how much money we are willing to offer the church; it's about how much of our lives we are willing to offer to Christ.

That offering is perfectly articulated in the vows that each of us took when we became a member of the church. You know them well. We pledge to support this slice of God's kingdom with *our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness*. They are easy words to recite and even easier to affirm. But I wonder sometime if their simplicity belies the totality of the commitment they communicate. Because by affirming those vows, we communicate to God and to our brothers and sisters in Christ that this is the place where we will come to work on our faith. These are the people with whom we want to journey on the pathway of discipleship. And these are the people to whom we will turn for encouragement, for inspiration, for support and even for correction at times. And in turn, we will offer that same encouragement, inspiration, support and correction to those with whom we journey. This is the place where we will turn as we seek to live out our faith in a real, tangible way. And in making that decision, we also commit that we will bring everything we have to that journey.

Back in the Spring, we as a faith community voted to affirm the vision that emerged from the *As For Me & My House* process. Together we embraced the truth that we exist as a faith community to cultivate a passion for Christ. That, first and foremost, our reason for being is to inspire and encourage one another to move “Jesus is Lord” from a statement of belief to a reality of being. Since the summer, I have been working with a team of dedicated servants to begin implementing that vision, to make it our reality. Much of what has happened thus far has been behind the scenes, planning and preparing, laying the groundwork for our future together. As this series kicks off, however, that planning will begin to form our reality. For we will explore together not how much we should commit to give, but rather what the commitment we already share empowers us to do. What it means to live out our shared covenant so that we create the space for God to work and the Holy Spirit to move. What it will look like when that spoken affirmation becomes a living reality.

So this is my promise to you. During this series, I am not going to ask you to commit to anything new. Instead, together we are going to explore how we faithfully live out the commitment we already share. So don’t miss out. We worked long and hard to discern the vision that God has for this faith family. This is the part where we begin to see just exactly what God had in mind.

See you Sunday.