

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Stewardship Witness

Sunday October 29, 2006

I have been thinking a lot about what it means to be God's steward, giving of my time and money. I have been thinking about faith, trust, transformation, grace, and my own relationship with God. I have been thinking about camels and the eye of a needle, pigs that fly and Hell freezing over. I have been thinking about Jesus' words to the rich young man.

About 5 years ago, I was blessed with an opportunity to grow in faith. I had a light bulb moment that changed my life. I discovered that even small sacrifices in my life that require faith can have a major impact on my relationship with God. I learned that my outlook on life and the world around me could be dramatically changed by small efforts. Little sacrifices and little steps of faith lead to larger and larger ones as we reach out toward God. I am going to ask you some questions that I asked myself.

Do you believe in God?

Do you believe God loves you?

Do you believe Jesus was his son and our Savior/

Do you believe that God with his human incarnation as Jesus and the spirit are one?

Do you trust God?

Do you believe God keeps his promises?

My answers to these questions are YES.

Today, I am unveiling a new stewardship plan for the next year at St. Paul's. I know many of you are homeowners. I am asking that you sell your house. Sell your car, your property, your clothes, your mother's heirloom china and silver, your antiques and collectibles, all of your material belongings. Keep the clothes you are wearing and pack a backpack with some food and a little cash. When you have done that, write a check of the proceeds to St. Paul's. We will put all of our proceeds from the sales together. We will buy as much food as we can, medicine, vaccines, seeds, livestock, clothes, other necessities and stockpile it all at the church. Then we will find the poorest people in the world who go to bed hungry, die prematurely of easily preventable diseases, and have no home. When we have found them, we will bring them aid, food, medical care to help them out of poverty, so that their self-esteem can be restored and they can become independent. The eye of the needle.

It is easier for a poor man to have faith. The alternative to faith for a poor man is despair. It is hard not to despair if you have nothing and no hope of ever having anything or improving your situation. It cannot get worse, but faith is still a choice. Hope and faith can help bring a poor woman through the dark night. Any amount of reward received is an answer to a prayer. Poor people who have received are usually grateful people and often generous. They have found faith and trust in God about tomorrow. They have had prayers answered.

However, the rich man. Are we rich? By world standards, if we have food on the table every night, a bed to sleep in, warmth when we need it, we are rich.

I confess that I cannot sell my house, and all of my things right now. Nevertheless, that is what Jesus asked the rich young man to do when the man responded and asked, "I have obeyed all the commandments, what else can I do?" Jesus told him, "You want to be perfect? Go and sell all that you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." The rich young man walked away disconsolate because he found he could not do what Jesus asked. His reaction and feelings were probably very similar to yours this morning when I asked you

to sell your house. I cannot do it either. Does that mean I do not have faith, do not love God enough, and cannot enter the kingdom? I do not think so. I think Jesus meant that as a rhetorical question or answer, I think he knew the man would not or could not do it but he got his point across. Jesus asks us to have that much faith in God's love that we will loose it all and find life. He wants us to care so much for our poorer brothers and sisters that we will share our only blanket. Jesus followers said, "You know Jesus if you put this high stake on salvation, no one will be saved." Jesus reply was, "Humanly speaking it is impossible but with God all things are possible". It is not by our works that we earn salvation. It is by God's grace that we are saved.

Why can't I risk it all? What keeps me from selling everything? Fear is a big part of it, lack of trust in God's promise, believing there is not enough, the cult of scarcity. Do I believe the words I have read? "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in me will never thirst". "I am the bread of life; all who eat of this bread will live forever." "I would give you living water". "But the water that I give you takes away all thirst". "...your Father knows what you need even before you ask him". "Don't worry about everyday life." "Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest". "Look at the birds. They do not need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are more valuable to him than they are". "And God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you"?

"...he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern". "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

Can I feel that much faith? Can faith change my life? Will God come through with his promise? I believe the answer is again YES. I want to have that kind of faith and I think I can approach it and grow in my relationship with God by taking baby steps.

I feel that if I will take a little more risk and trust each time a little more. If I push the boundary of my security a little bit further and simultaneously believe that all will be well. If I put my trust in God then I will change and I will grow in my faith. Little by little, my trust grows until I can risk everything, believe, and trust God totally.

Even little steps have changed my life. 5 years ago, I decided to commit more money than I ever dreamed I would to the work of the church. With the new commitment, I was not sure if I could make ends meet. I decided I would write the check when it was due every month just like any other bill, not leaving it until last to see if I had enough left over to make my pledge. On paper, my commitment was more than my budget could bear and be in the black. However, I did write that check and it was hard at first but the ends did meet and my life showed very little effect financially. However, spiritually my life changed dramatically. You could say that I unconsciously decreased my spending in other areas in order to make up the difference. Maybe I did but I believe it is God's work in action that when I took a step of faith toward him and he took a step to me.

Slowly I am becoming less fearful that I will not have enough. Less fearful about tomorrow and whether I will be able to live, as I would like. Slowly I am being set free of the fear that binds me to the earthly world and it feels wonderful and exhilarating. Slowly I am growing closer to God and faith gets easier in many other areas of my life. Our fear of scarcity keeps us chained in our own poverty. I have enough and will always have enough of what I need because God has promised. Enough may not always match my own idea of need but I trust in God to know what enough is. I believe St. Paul's has

enough and will always have enough because God is generous, he keeps his promises and loves us.

Do not sell your house. All I am asking you to do is take one little step in faith and grow in Christ. Make a commitment to God's work this year that stretches you a little past your comfort zone and believe. I ask that we use that extra commitment to help our brothers and sisters in need. Take the opportunity to feel the wonder of giving, to move closer in your relationship with God through greater faith and trust. You will be amazed at the result. We are Christians in community. We can grow in faith together.

Karen Kingry-Softy
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