

Introduction Giving to God, “Getting Completely Wet,” 9/7/08,
Pastor James E. Reents

Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father & our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

TEXT-Matthew 13:44 The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

PRAY-Dear God, help us to know the joy of totally giving ourselves for the sake of your Kingdom. Amen.

Two men were shipwrecked on an island. One started screaming and yelling, “We’re going to die. We’re going to die. There’s no food or water here. We’re going to die.”

A second man was propped up against a palm tree. He was so calm he drove the first man crazy. “Don’t you understand? We’re going to die.”

The second man replied, “You don’t understand. I make \$100,000/week.”

The first man looked at him dumbfounded and asked, “What difference does that make? We’re on an island without food and water. We’re going to die?”

The second man answered, “You just don’t get it. I make \$100,000/week and I tithe on that \$100,000/week. Don’t worry. My Pastor will find us!”

Would your Pastor go looking for you? Is that the meaning of stewardship? I hope our Gospel today will give us a deeper meaning.

Today we are beginning a series of stewardship sermons based on the book Giving to God by Mark Allen Powell. We’ll relate each chapter to the lessons for that Sunday. The introduction is entitled, “Getting Completely Wet” relating baptism and stewardship.

I want to do that by considering the parable about the treasure hidden in the field. I hope we’ll see that stewardship is more than a financial drive. We’ll look at 3 aspects of the beginning of Christian stewardship.

Christian Stewardship begins with STUMBLING.

I picture this parable as a poor tenant farmer plowing his field. He is tired, hot and bored. He is looking forward the end of the day and going home to family, food and rest.

All of a sudden he hears a thud. “Oh, no, another rock. I thought we got rid of them last year.” He clears the dirt away with his hands and can’t believe what he sees, a treasure. He’s never seen such wealthy. What should he do? Immediately he covers it, sells everything he has to buy the field.

Don’t get hung up on the honesty/dishonesty issues of this parable. The point is his joy in selling all he had and buying the field.

He stumbled upon it. It’s true isn’t it? We often stumble upon what is important in life. We don’t deserve it. It is pure gift.

Did I deserve being raised in a Christian home or the gift of health? Did I deserve to get to go to a Christian college and then 4 years of seminary education? Did I deserve marriage to Karyl and our children: Jeff, Steve and John? And our daughters-in-law: Janelle and Lisa and our grandchildren: Justine, Jordyn and Dean?

Did I deserve the calls I have had to Zion Lutheran Church, Carleton Nebraska; Trinity LC, Fairbury; Peace LC, Morris; First LC, Plano and now St. John’s @ Bloomington?

I did not and do not deserve any of these treasures at all. I thought I knew what I was doing at the time but the truth is I was flying by the seat of my pants. I stumbled upon them. It was pure gift. I was a recipient of something beyond my expectations.

The law interpretation of this parable is, “if I plow my field faithfully, work hard and keep my nose to the grindstone, I will be rewarded. Someday my ship will come in.”

The Gospel interpretation is that he stumbled upon it. It was totally unexpected. He didn't do anything to deserve it. He had no idea of the greatness of then treasure.

Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven is like that, a hidden treasure."

Did you catch that last paragraph of the Gospel? I love it. It has to be an under statement.

Jesus just told his disciples 5 parables on the kingdom of heaven. He asked them, "Have you understood all this?" They said, "Yes." The rest of Matthew shows how little they did understand. The kingdom of heaven was a gift to them also, and they didn't deserve it either. They stumbled upon it just like us.

So we've stumbled. What's next? 2ndly Christian stewardship begins with SPENDING.

Once he found the treasure, he was willing to do anything to get it. No priced was too much. "In joy he sold all he had and bought it."

Christian stewardship is good news. We want to do it. If it isn't joyful, maybe it isn't Christian.

We had an example of that in the Pantagraph last Monday. Here is a picture of a 3 ½ year old girl with Hurler Syndrome usually resulting in curvature of the spine. The pictures show her parents taking her to a swimming pool for therapy. She has changed their lives completely. But no where in the article do they speak of her as a burden. They want to do everything they can to help her.

The kingdom of heaven causes a reversal of our values. Our old patterns of the past have been completely broken. We are "completely wet."

Which leads us to the third part. Christian stewardship also begins by FINDING. Actually this should be 2nd point rather than the 3rd point. We find the treasure before selling everything. I've changed it because I want to end with the finding.

We are likely to respond to this parable by saying with sarcasm, "Lucky stiff. Won the lottery. I wonder when I'll get mine." Do you feel the jealousy?

So let us change the tense of the verb from finding to found. The good news of the Gospel is that we don't need to wait to find the treasure. It is present. It has been given. We have been found. The looking is over. We are free to respond.

The treasurer is none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus said repeatedly, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." That kingdom isn't as much a place as a person, a relationship.

Now let us go back where we started with our baptism and "Getting Completely Wet."

The day of our baptism is the most important day in our life. We become a child of God and heirs of God's promises.

Someone I read last week said, "Finding out why you and I are on this earth is worth all the gold in the world." That purpose is given to us in our baptism.

We baptize infants because we believe baptism is primarily an act of God. Those who believe in adult baptism emphasize the act of a person or a decision for Christ. We emphasize God's decision for us.

We believe all of the Bible is primarily an act of God and what we do is respond. That includes creation, covenant, prophets, birth of Jesus and the return of Jesus.

In baptism we are marked with the cross of Christ forever. I'm still thinking of the cross as the treasure because of the Gospel last Sunday. It was Jesus first passion prediction of suffering, dying and raising. Jesus said that in losing our live for His sake we will find life.

Because of the cross of Jesus Christ we can joyfully sell all we have. The cross is a past action. Through it we have been found. Therefore the mark of the cross in our baptism is the beginning of our stewardship.

The treasure has been found. It is here for the taking. We have been baptized. The Gospel is proclaimed each worship service. We have the privilege of receiving that gift again in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Now we are free to go and joyfully spend all we have to proclaim that kingdom. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.